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# THE HEART OF SALOME

## CHAPTER I

It was five o'clock of a lovely Spring afternoon, and the sun was warm upon the clean, white sidewalks of the Champs Elysées, when the gliding marvel of Sir Humphrey Leinster's town car swung into the Avenue from the Arc de Triomphe, and started to roll, proudly silent, down to the door of Claridge's.

The car was long as the cutter of a battleship, and its nickel and plate glass were as flecklessly polished. It was racy of line as a greyhound, but massive in bulk. A silver Bacchante danced upon its radiator cap, seeming to flee before it. A florid, fat chauffeur, dressed in livery, presided with the dignity of a jurist at its wheel.

The automobile slid through the lesser traffic of the boulevard as some stately dowager would have moved through an assembly of scullery maids, haughty and sure. It passed from speed to immobility without a tremor or a perceptible motion from

its director, immediately before the gold braided, war bemedalled functionary who stood all day before Claridge's smart hostelry, to help make alighting pleasant for aristocracy.

And, as with infinite deference, this veteran warrior drew open the door of Sir Humphrey's car, it was revealed to passers-by that all the automobile's splendour was only the simplest platinum setting for the jewel which it contained.

Diane Mayfield was beautiful. The world acknowledged it, all the world that counted to her, London, Paris, the Riviera, St. Moritz and Rome, just as in her girlhood had her home city of Boston, in the United States.

Hers was a beauty of face and form that would have shone in any age, in any circumstance, as peasant girl or princess, as indeed only recently the most successful portraits of the "Salon d'Hiver," had shown. There were two of which she was the subject, both daring, both exquisite.

One was that of a dancer, triumphant in an ancient, degenerate, voluptuous court, standing with eyes aflame and sinuous arms outstretched to receive from the hairy arms of a hideous executioner a silver platter, bearing the severed head of a saint. The painting was by Galuppi, the Florentine, and it won the Grand Prix. Crowds stood about it by day. By night, in salons and cafés, all Paris buzzed with its praises.

The other was wrung from the agony of the war. It was by Bezanne, who before the war was a rustic poet in Avignon. His delicate spirit had been exposed too long to the ugliness of the Somme, so that now many said he was mad, but all agreed he was a genius with a brush. It was a picture of Death beckoning to a hero, a mystic figure with the face of a Madonna, but eyes that puzzled. Viewed from one angle they seemed to beckon with love and compassion; from another, to mock, to sneer, and to be-little. It was before this picture that young Juan Fernandez, the South American millionaire, one of "The Mayfield's" suitors, had been found dead with a bullet in his brain one evening, an army automatic in his outflung hand, when attendants at closing time rushed to his prostrate side at the sound of a shot.

Beautiful by nature, in figure and countenance, and groomed with all the art and science that the wealth of too-civilized women can command, Mrs. Mayfield stepped from the velvet shaded tonneau of Sir Humphrey's Rolls-Royce with smiling self-assurance into the bright light of the world's most beautiful highway, and thence into competition with several of the world's most beautiful women.

"Merci," she smiled to the doorman.

Her tiny feet, revealed more than clad, in bronze sandal-slippers, with jewels at in-step strap, pattered across the pavement. Her slender ankles, sheathed

in filmiest gold, flashed in the sun beneath the rippling, mahogany-chestnut mass of her sable cape, hung negligently low upon her shoulders, but clasped so tightly to her as she swept to the hotel door, that it accentuated rather than blurred the lines of the body it enveloped. A little Oriental turban of gold, devoid of ornament, contained the glory of her chestnut hair. And her jade green eyes, almost almond shaped, were aglow with the reflection of flames in the woman's soul they mirrored.

She whirled through the swinging door and across Bokharan rugs to the fauteuil, where the lean, long figure of the Hon. Hubert Mainwaring was sprawling wearily, one leg draped carelessly over his malacca stick. He was wearing a perfect, Bond-street morning coat and an air of infinite ennui.

"Am I late?"

The Gothic figure unwound itself and stood towering over her. "Damnably late. Two whisky-sodas, two strolls, and three pretty women late. That's a beastly long time."

"I'm sorry." There was penitence of no consequence in her tone. Her eyes surveyed the tables of the tea room in the sunken garden near by. There was no one of importance there, and at last she turned to her companion. "Is it worth it?"

"You are perfect."

Her white hand fluttered to rest upon his arm for one swift instant of friendship, of feminine depend-



ence, of flattery to his strength. "I think I'd like to dance, if you'll take me."

They moved down the hall of mirrors, noiselessly sinking in velvet, toward the dancing.

There was the usual clattering crowd at the dancing, too many tables, too close together, too little floor space, and two bands, one American and one Argentine, working alternately without interval, where one would have sufficed.

"Ghastly," Mr. Mainwaring called it, though he was there practically every afternoon when he was in Town and was not next door at its duplicate in the Hermitage.

It was warm in the hall. The sweet, intermingled scent of wines and the aroma of many blended Asiatic and Nile tobaccos, the fumes of whisky, the fragrance of dying flowers, the lush perfume of exotic women, and the animal exhalation of polyglot, middle-aged and wealthy men, toiling in the heated pursuit of pleasure, merged in an incense that rose like steam above the turgid throng.

The cymbals clashed; the saxophones wailed; marimbas boomed; there was a rattling of plates and a tinkling of glasses; there was the fresh laughter of girls in the gaiety of their 'teens; and the murmuring hum of scandal-mongering voluptuaries in their mid-thirties. There was the cackling of old men, waxed and touped, and laced into shape, wheezing over indecent jests; the shuffling of feet

upon the floor, and the rubbing of sandpaper in the hands of a drummer, like Dead Sea surf whispering upon parched sand. Elderly women with big busts supporting unbelievable jewelry were hoarsely advising youth.

Here was ultra-civilization, slipping from beauty into decadence. The yellow-white serpent trail of the poppy's drug wound in and out the assembly, easily discernible to the initiate. Only a few of the women were entirely marvellous. Their men had combed the world for their eternally flawless gems, and bought them each at its price. But the perfection of the bearers was all too swiftly marred by the madness of their gaiety; by pleasures harder than labour, in the pleasure capital of the world.

Among those few who for the fugitive season walked serenely the perilous height of perfect beauty, Mrs. Mayfield, the American, was easily first, and she was sentient of it, as she strolled into the dancing, with the ungainly but distinguished Briton cavaliering her, a well calculated foil for her charms. She recognized the tribute of the head waiter's almost worshipful attention as he conducted her to a table secluded enough for conversation but conspicuous enough so that she would be star of the management's profitable show.

No girl-revue from Piccadilly, Broadway, or the Rue Bergère could compete in seductiveness with the volunteer feminine parade of Claridge's in mid-

spring, and André knew it. He managed it accordingly.

"Awf'ly hot," the Hon. Hubert vouchsafed when they were seated. "A little something with ice in it might not hurt us." He ordered his usual high-ball, and his companion took tea, with the dissipation of a small pastry.

They regarded the assembly, and the Hon. Hubert was convinced it was "ratty." His companion laughed, "All but you and me?"

"Righto."

Mrs. Mayfield was fairly content. She inspected several of her rivals and found none of them alarming. She bowed and smiled to a few of the dancers. There was M. Coudikis, the Greek banker, portly, bald and benign, whose judgment in the stock market seemed to be infallible; Étienne de Marsac, reputed to be the richest youth in France since the war, dancing with his watchful mother, to whose grateful arms the Mayfield had returned him, when his passion burned too ardently; Sir Gregory Hume, that brilliant diplomat, fresh from the triumph of adding more wealth to his empire; and the strikingly faun-like Spaniard, the Duc de Montebran, who had just married a Pampas rancher's heiress, and was for the moment faithful.

They danced. The Mayfield was in one of her most distant and abstract moods, but swayed lightly as wind-blown thistle-down in the arms of her partner.

She recognized intuitively his languid grace, stepping to rhythm only a little less perfectly than a dancing master, after Chesterfield's formula for gentlemen.

She was conscious of a dreamy content. Mme. d'Avril, her masseuse, had been with her an hour that noon, and she recalled how deftly and how gradually the raw-boned Norman woman had moulded her mind to peace in smoothing and flexing the muscles that rippled firmly beneath the soft, blue-veined whiteness of her skin. From tiny toe to crown her every nerve had been most strangely troubled throughout the morning, and her heart held only an aching emptiness. Then Mme. d'Avril had entered, brisk and big and healthy. As always, the Mayfield's spirit vaguely rebelled at first against the intrusion of her treatment, but as the coolly vital, almost electric fingers pressed, and pulled, and patted, and each crying fragment of her flesh was lulled to sleep, she had been drowsily thankful for these last refinements of luxury, which the continent had brought her.

Undisturbed and distant she floated through a round of dances, first with the Briton, then with the latest bruising millionaire from that mother of millionaires, South America, back to her escort, and then to those few flattered others who were permitted once in awhile to storm in vain against her luring and maddening aloofness.



Men were such easy prey, she had grown indifferent to them. Rarely they moved her, and when they did, she loathed them,—all except two. And her mind this sunny Spring day began to rove back more and more to that widely varying two. The small talk of humoring her retinue she accomplished almost automatically. Her spirit leaped and strayed.

Her eyes, surveying the dancers, encountered the semi-mocking smile and impudently appraising stare of an old acquaintance but no friend, Mr. Thomas Malone, the erstwhile "Plug" Malone of the race-track, ex-jockey and bookmaker's "tout." There was open disdain in her instant's glance of reply. A swift nervous nausea possessed her, but as her head was turning from him, she glimpsed the face of the girl with whom he was dancing.

There was something so strangely familiar about it that she followed the couple as they swung together down the hall, the broad shoulders and elbows of Malone clearing way in the crowd, and the girl so tightly clasped to his breast that her ebony hair was pillowed upon him. The surprise of recognition followed. Involuntarily Mrs. Mayfield's eyes dilated; her vanity case dropped to the floor; she lost track of what her companions were saying.

It was "Monte" Carroll's little sister, grown up, but not grown far,—the child could not be more than eighteen,—dropped suddenly across the ocean from

the sweet, clean meadows and rolling apple orchards of Carrollton, into the arms of this,—this——

Haugh! The Mayfield shivered in disgust, then her heart turned cold. "Monte" Carroll's sister dancing with "Plug" Malone!

She knew Malone. Sir Humphrey Leinster employed him sometimes on dubious errands. The demands of statecraft call for all kinds of talent. But the girl with whom he was dancing could not even know his species. Few did, but a select circle of rich and faded old women, some of whom sat near by, daubed with paint and loaded with massive jewels, clutching with their shaking, bony fingers to grasp the sensations of youth. They knew Malone, and they, too, were sometimes his employers. The Mayfield knew him, and all about him, and them, by a queer, odd chance that made her shudder again.

She conquered her revulsion and turned to her escort. "I wish you'd go and bring Mr. Malone and the girl he's dancing with over to our table," she said. "They're over at that further corner."

The Honourable Hubert looked at her with eyebrows tilted in question. "Queer, queer taste," he deplored, but started to unwind.

"I used to know the girl." Her voice was hesitant and very low, and her gaze was thousands of miles away. "Back home," she breathed.

Mr. Mainwaring was not obtuse.

"Rummy old world," he smiled at her, gently,

and as an old and privileged friend permitted himself to pat her hand in doggish sympathy.

He moved away, and returned with the ill assorted pair. They had but one thing in common, these two; they were both Americans in a foreign country, and though her life had long since made Mrs. Mayfield completely cosmopolitan, it flashed across her as they approached with the towering English aristocrat, how strong are the barriers and bonds of nationality.

"I've heard loads about you," was the girl's enthusiastic greeting when their hands had clasped and she had dropped into a chair. "Oh, do give me a cigarette. I've run out, and Mr. Malone smokes these horrible Turkish ones. He's been telling me what a famous person you are. What a perfectly darling vanity case."

"I'm glad you like it, and I'm very glad I saw you here. When these two gentlemen trot off to the bar, I'll reveal the secret of just how young you were when I first knew you in the States, and you can tell me all the scandal of the old home town."

"Both from Boston, eh,—a couple of beans," rumbled "Plug" Malone; "you want to remember, girlie, that Mrs. Mayfield is a string bean, and don't let her string you."

"I think we need cocktails, Malone," said the Hon. Hubert. "Perhaps if we have plenty you will pick a winner for me at Enghien to-morrow."

With an inner grimace, not lost upon his comrade, he grasped the man's elbow in simulated friendliness. "We'll just pop off," he said, "and let you two blessed Yankees wave the flag together."

Malone was hurried but still affable. "That's right," he said, "you ladies must have your gossip." He guffawed delightedly at his wit. "What is the latest dirt from Scollay Square?"

Then he discovered that he was on his way, the gentle but firm pressure of the Hon. Hubert Mainwaring at his elbow, and the aristocrat saying in his ear in the chummiest manner imaginable, "Queer old place, Boston, what? I was there once, you know."

Mrs. Mayfield's grateful glance was on the Briton's broad back, and her thought was running, "What a dear boy Hubert is," but her voice was saying, "Have you been in Paris long?"

"Long enough to love it. Aren't the shops attractive? You must know it awfully well." There was just that shade of deferential envy in the girl's voice which marked her as born with tact.

Mrs. Mayfield regarded her. The mark of the manor was certainly upon her. How much she looked like "Monte." She wondered for a nervous instant how much the child could have heard about her back home, then thrust the thought aside as nonsense. All THAT was before the war, eight years ago; the girl would have been ten or eleven years old.



Probably she would only recall her existence dimly. Boston had undoubtedly forgotten her.

"It's a long time since I was in Boston," she said. "But I still read the Wednesday Night Transcript. I used to know Colonel and Mrs. Carroll a little. How are they?"

"They're quite well. But how in the world did you know who I was?"

The Mayfield laughed. Her laughter was like the rippling tinkle of miniature silver chimes, but there was the faint, far, echo of sadness in it. From her vanity case she drew a slender, long cigarette holder of jade, and implanted in its tip a Lilliputian tube of white. The girl watched her tapering fingers, even as all women did and most men, till a waiter arose by their side as silently and instantaneously as if summoned by fabled genie. Mrs. Mayfield leaned to meet the garçon's flaming match and a thin wreath of blue smoke writhed from the warmth of her lips.

"You know we older folks grow sentimental," she jested. "I have your débutante picture, clipped from the Transcript, in my library desk at home, with some of other people I used to know in an earlier incarnation, when I was Diane Barrett, of Boston. One of them is your brother, 'Monte,' who was fond of me in my youth. You never heard of me, did you?"

The ingénue was somehow awed, though she did

not dream of the supplication, the prayer to fate, of "you never heard of me, did you?"

"I must have seen your picture somewhere," she answered, "but I can't think where. Are you one of the Chestnut Hill tribe, or from Cambridge? Mother would place you in ten seconds flat, but I can't."

"I'm Allan Barrett's sister. You must know Allan. He was the fattest man in Boston when I was there. He looked like the dome of the State House. And he married that Dixon girl from Mt. Auburn, who wore funny hats and was a doctor of philosophy from Radcliffe. You surely know them."

Miss Carroll "my-deared," with an appreciative chuckle. "Of course I do. He is the most wonderful bridge player,—really famous."

"He would be, I'm sure. By the way, have you known Mr. Malone long?"

"Since I've been in Paris, four days. Why?"

The Hon. Hubert dropped into the chair beside them, alone. He was quite unruffled.

"I've ripping news for myself," he said to the girl. "Mr. Malone had forgotten an important engagement, and he won't be back. So Diane and I can have you to ourselves for a bit, and maybe you'll give me two or three dances, what?"

The Mayfield beamed upon him. "You're a good boy, Hubert, and I think I'll take you riding in the



Bois later on. Did you have to remind him of it very forcibly?"

Mr. Mainwaring carefully adjusted a monocle; flecked some imaginary dust from his sleeves with his handkerchief, then grinned. "Oh, he had rather a nasty temper," he said, "but it didn't go beyond harsh words."

The girl stared with amazed understanding. "Was he as bad as all that?" she appealed the elder woman. "I didn't know. Some people I met on the boat introduced him to me at the hotel. And then it turned out he knew my brother, Monte, in the war—was in his air squadron. Aunt Lutetia wanted to poke about the Louvre this afternoon, so I let him bring me out to dance. I love to dance."

"Righto!" said the Hon. Hubert, rising. "I've been watching you. Won't you try it again?"

They swung away, with their companion's mock blessing.

Mrs. Mayfield was content to be alone. The freshness of that child! And the innocence of her, with her mask of sophistication, her smartness, and enthusiasms! Could this be the post-war "flapper" concerning whom there was such an uproar in the States? A wave of longing for a glimpse of that rock-bound coast of home rolled cumulatively toward her heart, and crashed upon it like a breaker upon the North crags. And she weathered it just as they

do. What dear folks they were! But bitterness tinged her memories.

Monte Carroll's sister! She had a sudden impulse to escape the crowd. Her friends were returning.

As they seated themselves by her side she picked up her gloves and vanity case, and drew her wrap over her shoulders.

"I want you both to ride with me in the Bois tomorrow afternoon," she said. "We'll have tea at the Château de Madrid. I'll call for you. Hubert, you'll take Miss Carroll to her hotel, when you both get danced out." She clasped his hand, as it lay upon the table, and shook it firmly. "I never have been more fond of you than I have been this afternoon," she told him. Then to the girl, "Where are you stopping? At the Plaza-Athénée? I'll be there at half-past two. Hubert will be there too. Your Aunt Lutetia must be Lutetia Waverly, the painter, isn't she? I'll wager she recalls me dimly and disapprovingly, but I'll call on her. Meanwhile, au revoir."

Mr. Mainwaring helped her extricate herself from the crowded chairs. "Typically Diane, to-day," he said. "Damn perverse to trot off this way, but I love you."

"By the way," the Mayfield asked of the girl, studiously indifferent, "where is Monte these days?"

Miss Carroll was obviously troubled. "I don't

know," she confessed. "We none of us know very much about him since the news that everybody had of him during the war, though he writes to mother sometimes. But I'm pretty sure he's in Paris. I'm really here to find him."

"I'll help you," said the Mayfield.

"Then he's as good as found," said Mainwaring.

Mrs. Mayfield fled through the corridors to the street. "*Chez moi*," she said to the flushed giant at the wheel, as at first glimpse of her coming from the hotel door he spirited the huge car to her feet from up the crowded curb. She sank deep in the cushioned shade, and stared with unseeing eyes as he whisked her out past the Trocadèro to her home in Passy. The tears had gathered in her eyes as she crossed her threshold, but her maid, Lysiane, stopped her with a huge white letter lying across her bronze tray.

She ripped it open, with swift recognition of the bold crest, and the wavering, struggling penmanship. She glanced at its contents.

Then she almost ran to the solitude of her chamber. The sables slipped to the floor behind her as she strode. She flung herself face downward in the deep, silk comforter of her massive, canopied bed.

## CHAPTER II

SHE still was lying there when Lysiane came in to close the shutters of her great French windows, looking out through the leafy verdure of the Quai de Passy upon the busy Seine.

"Madame is ill?"

A long sigh shook the tumbled figure upon the bed. Mrs. Mayfield rose upon one elbow and half turned, resting her head upon a hand.

"I dine out to-night, Lysiane. You will inform Henriette. And I must look as well as possible. I must look badly now."

The girl began to busy herself with the hooks and eyes of the woman's frock.

"Madame could not look other than herself. By time for dinner you will move as a queen."

She slipped off the bronze sandals, and peeled each golden stocking. There was a merry, little fire in the grate nearby, for the nights of Spring were still cool. Madame, at its first glow, wriggled her pink toes toward it like a schoolgirl. Lysiane went to the chifferobe and drew forth a green velvet

dressing-gown narrowly bordered with fur, and a glossy pair of gold brocaded mules. She placed an armchair and foot-stool before the grate, and helped Madame to arise. Her frock dropped to the floor. As an elf-white sprite stepped out of it, Lysiane swathed her and tucked her into her chair.

“Will you bring me that letter on the bed, Lysiane?” Mrs. Mayfield halted her maid at the bathroom door. The girl brought it, and placed a reading lamp, drooping like a bluebell over the woman’s shoulder. She pulled its tasselled cord and shuffled away again. There was a sound of running water beyond the chamber’s door.

Mrs. Mayfield read the note once more:

“Dear Mrs. Mayfield,” it ran.

“I would be gratified if you would dine with me at eight-thirty promptly to-night. There will be another guest at ten, and your exceptional talents will be of great use to me then. Rest assured of my highest esteem, and more, my warmest affection.”

It was signed by a name of which many people have heard, at which many have wondered, by a man whom few men know, Sir Humphrey Leinster.

Sir Humphrey has been called greater than kings, the “Emperor of Finance.” It is known that he is one of the richest men on earth, if not the richest, and that his wealth is growing almost beyond



reckoning. His gnarled fingers draw tribute from Singapore to Mexico, from the coffee plantations of Brazil to the oil fields of Mesopotamia. His swift ships ply all the seas, and his trafficking makes the rails rumble across five continents.

As his trading moves, the Socialists of Europe charge, the course of nations sways and turns. Men are ruined or brought to fame by a nod of his head; he presses a button in most of the chancelleries of the world, and diplomats jump like lackeys; he wields like wands such weapons as strikes and wars, and he has harnessed to his wheels such forces as national passions.

One of his homes is in the shadow of Downing Street, and another in Paris, on the Champs Elysées, not far from the Elysée palace. He has others, but they are not so well known. At these, if a man should ring the door-bell and inquire for Sir Humphrey, he would be met with the laughing response that no such person ever lived there.

It was to the home of Sir Humphrey that Mrs. Mayfield was invited that evening. She did not doubt an instant that the invitation was a command. For two years, now, she had been going to Sir Humphrey's house at frequent intervals, and elsewhere over the continent at his orders. Her visits and travels had paid her beyond her dreams in luxury. They had lifted her modest fortune to one of real wealth. Mrs. Mayfield had nought to complain of,



she realized, in Sir Humphrey's generosity. She long had known of his affection for her, and returned it in whole-hearted friendship. But recently his affections had deepened in ardour. She knew his power. She recognized that he was lacking in any scruple in attaining his ends. She had had one sharp combat with him, and had come off victorious for the moment, but she was afraid.

For the first time in her life, she admitted she knew the horror of fear; of chill, heart constricting, breath snatching terror. She hurled this ugly invader from the lofty ramparts of her spirit, again and again, in contempt, but always he came stealing back.

The Mayfield was brave, and proud, beyond most women. She had become a little hardened by life's conflicts, she knew as she gazed into the impish dancing of the yellow-blue flames. She did not cringe at the errand of the evening. She knew what it would be, with this guest, whoever he might be. She had seduced men from their weakling honours and loyalties before now, in the cause of her employer. Then she had always tricked them of their price, with scorn for their gullibility and for the sway of their appetites over character. She had never lost in these battles. She had come from each unscathed, and bearing whatever spoils Sir Humphrey Leinster had required, papers and promises, and strategic information.

Only, for a little while that afternoon, had come to

her the vision of her youth, of a life less complicated and more sweet, of comparative innocence, among homes and people who did not dream of old world evils, whose lives were tuned to gentleness and honour and high faiths.

Her youth! She smiled ironically, and languidly stretched each ivory arm, high above her head, and reached with pointed toes to catch the delicious glow of the firelight. Her girlhood, rather, for the life stream that danced in ecstasy through her straining limbs proclaimed her a brimming chalice of the wine of youth, and the pulse that throbbed along her throat and half-veiled breast declared her only a moment since full-blown into the flower of womanhood.

But she had been tired of life scarcely half an hour ago, at least of the life she was leading. Memories which she had tried for ages to stifle and kill had come battering at her heart's armour, roused by the sight of "Monte" Carroll's sister. She was only twenty-six. But what centuries of experience had been packed into those eight years since she had stood in orange blossomed veil before the altar of that sombre church on Copley Square, by the side of old Daniel Mayfield, the East Indian spice king.

For one thing, the war had rolled over the world, and everywhere life was not as it had been. The passing age was in travail, giving birth to the new.

And Daniel, flushed and hoary pirate of commerce, was dead. Thank God!

"Madame's bath is drawn."

She welcomed it. She loved the warm caress of violet scented water, and the rough embrace of harsh, crash towelling, the virgin cleanliness of crisp linen, and all the bounding reactions of bodily well-being.

There would be treacherous intrigue of greed to-night, she knew. Therefore, she must appear most innocently white. She must annihilate "The Mayfield," woman of the world, and summon back that dainty Diane Barrett, whom she had mourned so grievously this afternoon.

Lysiane fastened her milk-white stockings, even as she stood exultingly before the tall pier-glass of her dressing-room and noted with uplifted soul that no trace of her soft, luxurious life upon the continent had yet begun to mar her figure.

Seated, she lolled and dreamed, while her agile-fingered girl unpinned her chestnut hair, till it dropped about her shoulders and hung in lustrous ripples down the outlined pillar of her neck, unending till it lay in her lap. A great trouble, her hair, she sighed, but worth it. She permitted herself the luxury of a cigarette, while she sipped the aperitif, which Henriette always brought from the cellars to her boudoir before dinner.

"C'est la jeunesse, ce soir," she murmured, half to herself, and partly as an instruction for the style

of her coiffure. "I am a little village girl, dressed for a very great party."

"All as a bride, Madame."

Lysiane combed and brushed and toyed and experimented with each thick shining strand, till it was arranged to her own and Mrs. Mayfield's pleasure. Her mistress roved the walls with idle eyes, and found them suddenly in need of change. There was a new interior decorator exhibiting that week upon the Faubourg St. Honoré, and she vowed she would go and see what he could do for this boudoir which she had fondly believed so pretty, twelve months ago.

They were panelled in olive green, and Verneuil had painted upon them the gently rolling hills of his native "cote d'or," spotted with cherry orchards, hinting toward summer bloom, and cut by the broad military roads of ancient Gaul, lined with poplars from the outskirts of dull pink and blue villages, their colours all subdued. Here was the rocky cave where Vercingetorix had lain hidden from the Roman legions, and there the bubbling streams where peasant women knelt to wash their clothes, and meadows where cattle grazed in peace. Here one could live in a pleasant vista of all out-doors, with one's shutters barred against the inclemencies of winter.

"But it's Verneuil's paradise and not mine," mused Mrs. Mayfield. "There should be a New England apple orchard bordered with vines of Concord grapes." Again the twinge of memory. "Or



better, an Egyptian court, that's the 'dernier cri,' to-day."

The striking of a silver chime from the cloisonné clock on the mantel announced it half-past seven.

Madame ordered her gown of ivory brocaded velvet, with only a modest décolletage, a girlish "V" neck. She rummaged through the rosewood recesses of her jewel case and drew forth a tenuous thread of platinum from which were suspended two pear-shaped emeralds, and hung them sparkling warmly against the creamy softness of her throat. Lysiane fitted her feet into green slippers of satin, and brought her a fan of sweeping ostrich plumes to rival the verdure of palms.

She would be coldly distant as the Jungfrau's peak, but the mountain-top must glow with suggestion of inner volcanic fires. Only the faintest line from her pencil accentuated the arch of her eyebrows. She bit her lips till they flamed. You'll do, dear friend, she smiled to the girl in the glass, then wrapped herself in an ankle length cape of ermine, and bade Lysiane "au revoir."

With pulse quickening to the evening's conflict, she started through the hallway of her apartment, then seized by an impulse, returned to her boudoir. She drew from a bureau drawer a long white scarf of filmiest silken mesh. She wrapped it turban-fashion about her coiffure and knotted it tightly, low around her forehead. She skipped down the stairs to the



porte-cochere, where Sir Humphrey's great car awaited her manned by Umberto, faithful, brave, and discreet.

"We have forty minutes, Umberto," she said, "to ride far and fast. Take me to the 'bois,' then stop just beyond the gate."

She climbed into the tonneau and was whisked to the Bois de Boulogne. Scarcely had the car rolled to a full stop when she was out in the street. She slammed the door of the cab shut behind her, and was up in the footman's seat beside her chauffeur.

She inhaled a great gulp of the wine-like air.

"Umberto, the devil is just behind your tail-light, bent on vengeance for all your sins." The driver crossed himself, but his eyes were laughing at this friendly goddess.

"Drive fast, as you value your soul, anywhere to lose him, for twenty minutes. Then you may take me to Sir Humphrey's."

The car leaped away like a frightened deer, and fled, "*ventre-à-terre*" through the wooded avenues of the "Bois." The girl leaned back and closed her eyes to the rush of the wind. "Faster," she murmured, swaying to Umberto's ear. "He is about to seize us." They raced over rolling hills, and out into open country, careening marvellously around slower traffic edging away at the sound of their horn, and the muffled steady roar of the engine opened to its full. The girl did not open her eyes as the peasant

cottages, dimly lit and fragrant with wood smoke, vanished behind them, but drank the night with a rhythmic rise and fall of her bosom, until they glided to a stop once more outside the Paris gates.

"Thank you," she smiled, sitting up. She sprang to earth and banged shut the door. "Some beautiful night we will hit something, 'mon ami,' and you and I will go to Heaven."

"God forbid."

Ten minutes later they rolled majestically to the door of Sir Humphrey's, and Umberto was richer by a crisp note he clasped after a most democratic hand-shake.

"*Dio mio*, she is divine," he muttered, off to a nearby *bistro* for brandy.

That is what Sir Humphrey said in his great salon, as he grasped both her hands and kissed them. "Diana come to earth," he flattered, "I hardly think my humble fare can compete with nectar and ambrosia, but will you come to dinner?"

But Sir Humphrey's dinners were marvels. At sixty, he was hard as nails and a gourmet. He ate ravenously, and his companion was a healthy woman.

"There will be company at ten," he said, over a piping hot "potage Saint Germain." "There is much eating, and little talking to be done before then. Our guests are the comtesse de Vendôme, and a Mr. Starrett, an American, one of these honest damn fools, who is in Europe and has been in the Near

East in two capacities. In the first place he is the eyes of a Mr. Redfern, vice-president in charge of production of the Gulf-Eagle oil combination. He has been looking over Mosul and Baku. The Gulf-Eagle thinks it will get some oil there."

Mrs. Mayfield listened, ate, and watched her companion admiringly. A little, swarthy man, his black hair just flecked with white, as if he had been walking hatless in a light snow, his fiery red-brown eyes, gave the lie to calendars proclaiming him advancing into old age. He radiated force and vigour, latent power, as the rolling sinews of a tiger beneath his glossy coat betray capacity for swift attack.

She watched his hands, big and bony and long fingers, hands to grasp, and clutch, and wring the life from opposition; lean engines for the acquisition of profit. She could not imagine them relaxed, nor generous. To be sure, he had been generous with her, but at first it had been the shrewd open handedness of good business, cementing the loyalty of an exceptional servant. Later it had held in its largesse the taint of temptation, as one who was taking her up to a high mountain and showing her the wealth of principalities, and whispering in her ear that they might all be hers.

"In his second capacity," Sir Humphrey was saying, over fresh river salmon, hooked but that morning in the Loire, "he is the ears of the American state department, and in particular has been

listening to tales about me, which he is to relay to his secretary of state. And fully one tenth of them may be true."

Mrs. Mayfield reminded him, "You have paid for silence before now. It is purchasable on the market."

"To be sure, but prices vary enormously in amount and in kind."

His voice was reminiscent, as one who has had many dealings in many marts. How many whispered legends cluster about him, thought the woman. She steeled herself against the fascination of the unknown.

"Monsieur Starrett is a strong man," said Sir Humphrey, when his butler, silently efficient as an electric current, had placed a carved, fragrant portion of Rouen duck before him, and was pouring a Burgundy sparkling with rubies, into the shining glasses. "It is of the year 1870, this wine," said the host with modest pride, "and holds the romance of the last empire in its bouquet."

"Perhaps I had better only inhale it," the woman suggested. "Such romance is dangerous." Then they both drank.

"I have tried him with money." They were back again to the guest of honour. "Loucheuse offered him the production managership of the Empire Petroleum Company at a fabulous salary and a share



in the profits of the new fields. He said he was flattered, and would be glad to consider it after he had returned to New York and reported on his confidential mission. When Loucheuse suggested that this report might find its way to the Empire Petroleum directors, he offered to wager a million francs it would not. He was offered a million bonus, for signing with Empire and bringing his information, and he knocked Loucheuse down. Loucheuse has sworn to kill him. But I will not have him killed. He would be too valuable a man."

"How old is he?" asked the woman.

"He is young, thirty-five at the oldest, possibly only thirty. One cannot tell of this war-generation. It aged fast. A bit of a mystery, as yet. My agents can find no record of him anywhere till he turned up at Angora with passports probably fraudulent."

"Is he well off?"

"Redfern treats him well. He has fifteen thousand dollars a year, that's two hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, and a drawing account for expenses of probably as much again,—not much, but fair enough for a young man. And he laughed at our million franc bonus."

"He is a new Saint Anthony?"

"Diable! It is impossible, but true. I have seen him. La comtesse de Vendôme is no mean baggage, with her baby blue eyes and her curls of gold, but



she broke her lance against his armour, though he likes her well enough."

"Alors——"

They were eating strawberries, the first of the season, each at a workman's day wage, with Chantilly cream.

"Alors,—I think you will catch my idea. Where women as women fail, love may win. I have a hidden ace, and she is my daughter, whom Monsieur Starrett will meet when he comes here to-night. One of my names is Jacques Lecouvreur, and I have a daughter, Diane. She is,—if you will pardon my saying so,—enchanted. Monsieur Starrett will meet Mademoiselle Diane, when la comtesse brings him to hear my pipe organ. It is famous over France. Monsieur Starrett loves music, and he will love Diane. Is it not very simple? Mademoiselle Diane is a clever woman. When courted in marriage, one exchanges confidences. Even more when betrothed."

"And for a little while after marriage."

Sir Humphrey shrugged. "Diane is too clever for marriage, though of course she has not seen the American, who is handsome and strong, brainy, and what is called a gentleman, a good match. I would bid her beware."

The Mayfield became more distant than a cloud, and as cold.

"There could be only one obstacle," she mur-

mured, "and that is that Diane might not be in the mood for hunting."

Sir Humphrey laid his napkin on the table. "We might have our liqueur and cigarettes in the library," he said. "I have a curio to show you."

The Mayfield smiled. "I'd like very much to see it. You always do have the most wonderful things."

He took her arm. "You should have been a business man," he told her. "You have the instinct and the finesse, but I should have lost a rare companion."

The curio was pretty, a light platinum chain strung with tiny diamonds, all of a size and flawless. The Mayfield dropped her emeralds upon the library desk, fitted the chain about her neck, and gazed at them in a hand-mirror, backed with mother-of-pearl and gold, which Sir Humphrey drew from a drawer.

"It is beautiful," she breathed.

"Men have been hung for less."

"Your information must be valuable."

"Damn the information. I want it, of course, but that's all Loucheuse was after. I want the man. He's one in a million. Will you get him for me, body and soul?"

Slowly she drew off the necklace. She placed it back in its satin case. "I'll try," she promised.

The butler was at the door.

"Madame la comtesse de Vendôme, and Monsieur Robert Starrett," he announced.

"Show them in here," Sir Humphrey ordered.

They faced the half drawn portieres of dark purple, and a moment later the kittenish bloneness of the comtesse came bursting through.

"My dear, dear friends," she greeted them. "I have brought a very charming young man to see you."

She turned to introduce a tall, broad-shouldered, slim-hipped, young giant, with blue-black hair, and piercing eyes of almost ebony black pupils, set widely apart beneath his high forehead. He had a thin, straight nose, and lips almost Puritanically tight, that seemed to belie their sternness by a barely perceptible upward turn at the corners, a turn repeated in the outer points of his eyes, as if an inner mockery were struggling to escape through the gateway of a smile the prison of a sombre mood. High, almost prominent cheek-bones, a lower jaw sharply carved, a firm, square chin with the faintest trace of a cleft at its centre, these features completed the face of a dominant, virile personality.

A compelling force, the man who towered in the frame of Sir Humphrey's library doorway, between its purple portieres, clad in tight jet dinner-garb with a broad expanse of white over a chest that would have done credit to a stevedore.

"Monsieur Robert Starrett."

Mrs. Mayfield swayed perceptibly forward as she

stared, then caught herself, one slender hand clutching the corner of Sir Humphrey's desk. Only for a fraction of a second had the new-comer caught and held her eyes in his, but she had seen his eyelids narrow and his mouth tighten more harshly, even while its corners mocked the more.

"Mlle. Lecouvreur!" He was acknowledging the introduction with a deferential bow. "And Monsieur Lecouvreur. I had heard of your other treasures, your books and your organ, but not of your daughter."

The laughter of the countess Vendôme ran the scale of treble bells. "I was indiscreet to bring you here, Monsieur. You have been so nicely attentive to me."

The Mayfield stepped forward, under perfect command. She stretched forward one sinuous, star-white arm, and for an instant their hands clasped.

When in doubt, attack,—so read one maxim in her rules of war,—and her life, she knew, as one desired of men, and one who held within her citadel a secret ally of her enemies, was war continual and desperate.

"How do you do, Mr. Starrett. I know I've met you before, somewhere." Behind the surface welcome of her voice was steely challenge. Her head was erect and proud, before the shrewd glance of Sir Humphrey, and the inevitable appraisal of another woman.

The visitor's voice was an unperturbed, formal pleasantness. "I couldn't be surprised," he said. "I've often been—somewhere."

"Fencers, both," the countess shot at them, "but we came to hear music."



### CHAPTER III

SIR HUMPHREY'S music room was a great hall, heavily panelled in age-darkened oak, hung with tapestries, and floored with rare hardwoods inlaid in geometric squares of alternate shade. Upon it stretched a dozen Oriental rugs. These rugs were beautiful. And into their making there had gone with lustrous long-forgotten dyes, the labour-blunted finger tips, the dimming eyes, and humble prayers of generations of desert folk, tossed by the great, mysterious Cause of life for brief instants of breath into the eternal sunlight, to do their appointed threads, and then to vanish into the sands whence they came, only the work of their hands remaining as evidence that they once existed.

The ceiling of the music room was deeply carved in rosewood, with garlands of flowers, and urns, and tiny forms and faces of babies, nymphs, and warriors. These were the handiwork of artisans proud of their craft in an era when wages were of minor importance beside such weighty considerations as perfection of

art. If one could climb close to that vaulted ceiling that hung so high above the living occupants of the room, he would see the differences in style and spirit where nameless fathers had dropped mallet and chisel from aged hands into the sturdier grasp of anonymous sons. The jokes and hates and family adventures of their creators would be seen imaged in the grimaces of the little figures which emerged in half or whole relief from the background of dust grey fibre.

At one side of the hall, from floor almost to ceiling, plush curtained windows gave a view of a garden and trees enclosed within the outer walls of Sir Humphrey's great mansion. At another side, a huge Aubusson tapestry told a "jeu d'amour" of some periwigged, silk-calved, pot-bellied Louis of France, playing with the ladies of his court in the garden of a château. The tapestry hung extended the entire height of the room. It hid the fact that the wall had been torn away. Behind it were the major pipes of the organ which Sir Humphrey had hired Guttwald, a famous organ builder of Mayence, to build into his palace. The instrument was equipped with an electric motor, and such other mechanism that music masters might pour their hearts' harmonies through its reeds and stops, long after their souls were one with the music of the spheres. There were other pipes and chimes scattered through nearby rooms, so that melodies might come from near or far, and the room be flooded with song.

An old man without kin, and doomed by his very greatness of power to have acquaintances rather than friends, Sir Humphrey had in music both companionship and solace. The organ was his greatest pride and closest confidant.

"I can turn it on and off when I will," he had explained to the Mayfield with a quizzical smile.

"So you can to the rest of your companions," she had answered him, then turned adamant, for she realized that in the one, sole, unspoken appeal for sympathy behind that wry smile, the Titan of finance had pierced her defences as at no other moment.

The room was so lavishly furnished that its great size was disguised. Floor lamps, standing like broad flowers on tapering stalks could light it in whole or in part, and there was an indirect lighting system installed by an American electrical company to make it refulgent with a softened day-light. There was a piano of grandiose area whereon distinguished, long haired Slavs had played to an audience of one. They then had been motored back to their hotels with their pockets pleasantly lined with a crisp and crinkly reward, beyond the gain of a crowded concert, while their spirits were uplifted by a glass or two of Sir Humphrey's centenarian port. Migratory songbirds between the La Scala and Metropolitan stages knew the advantage of giving their choicest notes to this recluse, and when they were away from Paris, their

voices could always be conjured from the great mahogany cabinet designed by the one American for whom Sir Humphrey had admiration.

A clutter of marble-topped tables, statuary, and bric-à-brac, numerous deeply cushioned easy chairs upholstered in velours or brocade, some chairs masculinely broad of back and sprawling of arm, some femininely trig and dainty, and fragile, with gilt wood and purple velvet predominating, were scattered overprofusely and without arrangement across the expanse of floor. They gave accommodation for a large company which was never to be invited, and provided jobs in the way of dusting for numerous servants, whose hands must never lie idle to the temptations of Satan.

All these things were in semi-darkness this evening, with only one great lotus bloom of mingled pink and blue light, pendant over the piano, and a smaller illuminated bluebell shedding its rays on the bench before the organ. This bluebell cast into white relief the smoothly flowing curves of one soft arm and shoulder, outstretched to grip the corner of the bench, so that the blonde curls of the comtesse Vendôme might lean more confidingly, trustful and dependent, toward the black shadowy shoulder of the elderly man whose hands and feet were busy with interpretation of a Bach prelude and whose mind was far away from the bewitching houri bending so fragrantly toward him.



Far across the room, two burning cigarette-tips were alternately aglow and fading into invisibility like two comradely fireflies, while from the darkness behind them languid clouds of blue smoke was idling into the direct rays of the lotus lamp and there consenting to be danced and tossed upward by vagrant air currents loitering in from Sir Humphrey's imported ventilation system.

Behind the companionable flickering of these cigarettes, that hovered so close together, there sat a man and a woman who had grown up together; a man and woman who had loved, fought, parted, and hated; who had longed for each other, and hated the longing. Now they were crossing their blades in another phase of their age-long duel, that duel of sexes eternally alien, eternally grasping and covetous, separated by the flimsiest of boundary lines, and doomed to swift alliances and enmities, to treaties and battles, to cold-blooded distastes and passionate attachments.

"Perhaps that's the hardest task of all, to learn to withhold judgment," said the woman. "But you, Monte, more than anyone else should have learned it."

"Perhaps I should, Diane, but I don't recall anyone withholding judgment on me. And as one grows older he grows sceptical."

"Well, suppose I were, that—that thing—which I seem, or which you have leaped to the conclusion I am to-night. I have, shall we say, cheated in the game



of life. Have you never condemned in your turn those hard of heart who damned, without a hearing and without consideration for temptation, a man, who had been caught—let us say, cheating?”

The man replied:

“Of course it seems to you another case of the pot calling the kettle black. But you see, whatever our old world at home may believe, whatever some think they saw, I know—and thank God I’m all that counts now—I know I didn’t cheat.”

The woman laughed ironically. “You’d have a hard time convincing the Copley Club of that, especially as you didn’t even try when the accusation was made. And you forget that I was sitting in the game.”

“I don’t forget that. I haven’t forgotten that game a day or a night in eight years, nor anybody in it. Some day I’ll find out, for my own satisfaction,—and damn all others!—just how it all happened. And you see I don’t have to convince the Copley Club, because dead men don’t have to convince anybody. And Monte Carroll is dead.”

“He was such a nice boy, too. I remember him well,” mused the Mayfield aloud. “Monte, your sister doesn’t believe you’re dead. She’s in Paris looking for you.”

“Oh, I’m not dead completely. I write to my mother once in a while,—once in a great while, I’m

sorry to say. She's just like the rest in believing me guilty, but she loves me."

The woman placed her cigarette in the tray by her side, and leaned more closely to her neighbour. One hand in half caress grasped lightly the sleeve of his coat. "I don't believe you're guilty, Monte. In fact I've always known you weren't, and I used to love you,—once."

The man stirred uneasily at her touch. "Playing the siren, Diane? I am even older now than I was when you grew tired of old Dan." His voice was cool and level.

"You hate me, don't you, Monte?"

"Not very much now,—I think I lost all that years ago. You see I can discuss it quite calmly. And if I remember now, we both indulged in some heroics when we were younger. Now——" he laughed, a little shaken, in spite of his words, "now I am quite indifferent to you. We meet to-night, strangely enough. To-morrow we are gone, for perhaps another eight years, or longer. We can afford to be frank, as old—as old friends, let's say."

"Be that as it may,—I think you're lying, and you still do me the honour of hating me."

"Egotist."

"You're determined to be nasty, aren't you?"

"Really not, Diane. But I'm determined not to succumb to the lure."

"That's much nicer. Now you're my old Monte

again. Do you remember when you told me I couldn't ride on your raft at the lake because I was only a girl?"

"Can't say I do."

"That shows you've kissed a great many girls since, because that was the first time you kissed me, and you ought to remember it. I cried,—not after you'd kissed me. I was too excited then. But before. Do you suppose you'd try to kiss me if I should cry now?"

"Please don't."

"Don't worry. A tear is too high a price for a kiss, and women over twenty-five know more subtle weapons than girls of whatever age I was,—fifteen, I think."

"Undoubtedly. But why use any weapon on me? Why not pick out a foeman more worthy of your well-trained steel?"

"Hear the man. You don't really think I'm wielding my rapier now, do you? And you accused me of being an egotist. Why, Monte dear, don't you know the difference between real fencing and just polishing one's sword to keep it bright?"

They laughed together, and suddenly found themselves back on the basis of an ancient camaraderie. They were conscious that the strains of the organ which had been tremulous and faint as from a great distance, were approaching as if nearer and nearer, playing one motif which strayed like a silver stream

in a winding meadowed valley, ever varying, ever the same, its waters peaceful and calm as they rippled through pleasant places, stirred to strife by the obstacles in their path, but always moved by one insistent purpose, never lost, to find their place in the infinite ocean.

"He improvises beautifully," said the woman. "Don't you think my choice of fathers is excellent."

"It should be profitable," muttered the man, and his companion recoiled at his bitterness.

"My oldest, and once my dearest friend," she spoke gravely, and slowly, after a long moment of silence between them. "You have lived some years in bitterness at the injustice done you by persons who were sure their verdict was just. I am sorry, but I am also a little disappointed that it has not yet taught you what even the masses, for all their ignorance, have learned; that the accused has a right to the benefit of doubt till the offence is proved beyond gain-saying."

"You forget——"

"I forget nothing, least of all the time when—when I stood convicted—that's what you meant, wasn't it? You say you have lived by night and day for eight years with one scene in your mind, the scene at the Copley Club. I've lived that too, with you and Dan and Dr. Burgess and Molly Manning in front of me, and the table between. I've even dealt the cards a



hundred times, and I know what each hand held, and I recall every word, and every gesture, and the expression on at least three faces. And Monte, I know,—I don't just believe,—I know you didn't cheat, so I can't sit here with you all convicted and sentenced to scorn, as you can with me. It might be easier for me if I could. I also remember the night you were about to reproach me with. And I know that with your Puritan creed, even though I was saved from—from actually conducting a liaison with the man I loved, in deception of that horrible old man to whom I was married—saved by the fineness of my man with his traditional code of honour,—I was immediately damned,—for ever damned, in his eyes—by the hardness, and intolerance, of that same ingrained tradition. I know the scripture. We went to school together. 'Whosoever looketh after a woman—or a man—for lust, hath already committed——' That's a little hard on humans. You never were fair to me, Monte. You were merciful,—and generous,—and gentle with me,—that night. After that you were brutally unfair, ungenerous, and intolerant——"

The man's voice was scarcely a whisper, and his words were those almost of reverie, rather than reply.

"I hated you."

"You had done that already, only I did not know how much, and I did not estimate you quite high



enough. I know better now. You're fine, Monte, but even after the suffering you've been through, you're hard."

Gently swelling from the murmur and sob of grief restrained, to a passionate protest, the music of mourning was filling the room from a hundred oaken pipes. They were silent as the theme turned to that of resignation.

The man started once to reply, but she silenced him with a soft, "Hush, please, I need this."

It was Verdi's "Requiem," and it rose to its supernal triumph, drawing their two hearts together and upward, with its unmistakable crescendo of faith, its defiance of the mysterious darkness into which men disappear, its brave confidence in a realm of light beyond.

As the organ pealed its last mighty shout of victory, and silence once more filled the hall, a little wisp of lace and linen brushing across the woman's eyes betrayed her vanished self-possession.

Then the artificial wrappings of society's training were falling away from her. Quite naturally, as a savage woman clad in leaves would trap and club some furry prey to death to satisfy her hunger, she mustered all her primeval cunning and power to down this man at her side. She wanted him. He, and he alone, she realized, had always aroused in her that torturing hunger, that mad, delirious desire, for something of which she had read, and talked, and

speculated, and dreamed since girlhood, the all engrossing, world obliterating, love of mate for mate. It flashed through her consciousness that she did not know whether she loved or hated him the more, even now, this man who had once been at her beck and call, and who had escaped her. More than escaped her! He actually defied her. He was scornfully indifferent to her. He had injured her deeply, and her wounded pride cried out for healing. She did not know whether she loved him or not, but only the knowledge of his love for her, and the strength of his arms about her, could ever sate her longing.

So with the melting appeal of utter loveliness, and the cool, hard calculation of a gambler staking all and mercilessly determined sweep the table regardless of his opponent's ruin, she fought for what she wanted.

"Monte," she said. "Do you remember the game with Yale your senior year in college?"

"Lord, yes, what a licking I took," was his chuckling reminiscence. "They hit me with everything except the stadium."

"It wasn't your fault. You were magnificent. I'll never forget the way everything inside of me jumped up and turned somersaults whenever you'd start around the ends. And when you got clear,—it was early in the game, wasn't it,—and every pennant and hat in the place, almost, was in the air when you went

over the line,—I laughed and laughed till the tears came. I shrieked. I hit Uncle Harley over the head with my cane till he picked me up and kissed me. And my hair was down over my ears, and I was quite disgraceful, but proud. I was proud because it was you, Monte, and I had a little claim on you then. You were carrying a little of me with you when you ran. And every time you got tackled, I was bruised. You remember that game, don't you?"

"The only game we lost in four years! And my team? I should say."

"The losing doesn't count so much, Monte. It's the playing that counts. And I remember the game mostly because after it was lost you needed me. You didn't talk all the way out to Wellesley Hills to the dance that night, and then you didn't dance much,—not with anybody but me,—but just sat and stared into the fireplace out in the ingle-nook, till I just took my courage in both hands, and you in both my arms. Do you remember that?"

"You were a brick, Di."

"Well, I loved you then, and of course I don't now. And you needed me. You used to need me often in those days, from when you were at Andover till—till just before the war."

"And I never failed you, did I?"

The man stirred uneasily. "Only once."

"All right, just once, and if we search back through

each year from the time you were sixteen until you were about ten years older, we'd find plenty of times when Diane proved the old reliable to a boy in a scrape or trouble, wouldn't we?"

"What's the use?"

"I'm coming to that. When you broke Sultan's leg and your own shoulder, jumping him over a barred gate, I got you back to town, didn't I, and alibied you with Uncle Harley?"

"As a girl, Diane, you were the best sport and pal a boy ever had,—but what of that?"

"Before we were—sweethearts, let us say,—I was a real friend."

"For years!"

"Very well. Now we are no longer sweethearts. There's been time for some of the bitterness of the break to pass away. I don't love you a bit, Monte, though I can't help being fond of you for just the years of which we're talking. If you were in trouble I'd help you now, as I did then. You don't love me. There's none of that sort of thing possible between us now. And I'm glad,—more glad than you know,—that there isn't. And just so there never can be, I'm willing, for the moment, that you think the things about me that have made you insult me to-night. Sometime you'll learn better. In the meantime, I'm in trouble. Consider, if you will, that I'm an old and very dear friend that has gone wrong and am disgraced. Still, I'm the old and very dear friend, and



I'm in trouble. I've men enough who want to be lovers, God knows. Too many! But this is the hope I've been clutching for all evening since I saw you, Monte, clutching like a drowning man at a straw, perhaps. I haven't a friend, a real friend, in the world. And I need one now as not many women ever have. For years I was that to you, Monte. And I thought for old time's sake, that after these years you would be willing to forgive a little the hurts I've given you, and for the time you're in Paris, or within reach, just be my friend. Couldn't you be that? Couldn't you stop reproaching me with the madness that followed a dreadful mistake of years ago? You really will be a friend to me, and help me, for a little while, won't you, Monte?—Won't you, Monte?"

The music had stopped.

The organist and his blonde companion had left the bench beneath the drop-light empty, and had vanished somewhere, unperceived, in the shadows or beyond. They were alone, the world as far away as if they stood together on some lonely hill-top with drifting clouds beneath their feet, shutting off the distant habitations of men.

Alone, and very near together, the subtle fragrance breathing from her lips, so close to his, was like a deep draught of forgetfulness and sleep held out to drink; and drinking, to wipe out the bitterness of years that stretched like painful miles back to the wreck of his youth. His nostrils quivered in the scent



of that tawny aureole that crowned her white forehead, and his eyes were drowning in the wide, unfathomable pools of hers, their sunlight jade turned aquamarine in the darkness of the room and the emotion of her appeal. Their colour and their force were those of a storm-lashed ocean wave, hammering, yet broken upon stern resisting cliffs that yielded only with the ages.

By the mute testimony of one strong hand that crept to her farther shoulder, and rested upon it, lightly, almost unwillingly, then strayed in the semblance of a distant, long forgotten caress, she knew she had moved him. She did not stir, for one long instant, poised so closely to him, and so tense, that a mere flutter of relaxation would have brought her home to the comfort for which she yearned. But she was wise with an ancient huntress' wisdom. She could almost feel, and wholly sense, the struggle that was rocking in his breast, for its counterpart was rising and falling within her own.

"Diane—Diane," he whispered brokenly.

Her vision was suddenly dimmed with tears, not for herself, but for this grown-up boy, whom she knew the world had hurt so cruelly. But her purpose was granite.

"You will, won't you, Monte?"

The long, strong fingers of his hand tightened like the grip of a vice upon the roundness of her shoulder,

tightened till she winced with pain, and even while tortured, exulted.

"God!" The oath was wrung through lips that writhed a moment in pain above his stern-set jaw, and then snapped tight and straight.

His hand fell from her shoulder. He rose abruptly. He switched on a second light within the lotus flower of pink and blue. The woman sank back against the pillows of their divan, fear clutching at her heart. He was strong, this new Monte, even stronger than the giant of old. Had she failed to win him? A swift rush of pride in him swept her, pride that he once had been hers,—and would be again, she vowed, with steel-like determination.

She watched him as he strode from the lamp to a window across the room, and flung its purple hanging wide, so that the moonlight flooded a square of floor and the chairs about him. He stood gazing out, across the trees of the garden, his back toward her, but not, she knew, ignoring her. So she waited, till he turned at last and slowly, towering, walked back to stand before her.

"There is too much sorrow in the world for you and me to hurt each other, Diane,—any more than we have," he said. "But it's infinitely better to cut sharply and have done with pain than to drag along with an unending succession of aches. That holds true with the heart as it does with the body. The wisest thing for us to do, after our meeting from an

eight years' absence, is to forget each other again,—for another eight years at least."

"But you never forgot me, did you, Monte?"

His reply was stubbornly hard.

"Almost. And just because I did not completely, we'd better go our ways to-night. It's true, Diane, you were the best pal a boy ever had, true as gospel. You were a real comrade for years. You were loyal, and sweet,—all that you've recalled to me to-night. If that were all, it would be easy for us to be the best of friends now. But you know that isn't all. You were more. You were my first love,—not 'puppy' love, 'cub' love, or anything like that, although I've called it that a thousand times. You were my first man-love, and I was a little more to you than a school-girl's 'crush.' You were a woman early, Diane, even before I grew up, and I was your first woman-love. We both know that."

"First and last, Monte." Her heart was beating desperately.

"Exactly, the last because the first. And that's why we'll never be friends again. There is too much between us. The past is never a securely locked door. And love is a fire that never dies. You can bank it in disappointment. You can stamp it out with rage. You can even turn the cold water of ridicule upon it. But if it's once been kindled it will never go out."

Mrs. Mayfield laughed, with a semblance only of calm. She had lost her first skirmish, she realized.

But her foe should not leave the field immune. He was determined not to be her friend. Perhaps, by his own admission, he might yet be more.

"One can always run away and forget about it,—in time." She was broadly ironical.

"Yes, indeed," he agreed, "and you can light lesser flames like back-fires to stop it from pursuing you. But I wonder if you can ever be sure they won't go out, and the one eternal fire leap the charred stretch in your life they've made, and consume you once more."

"Dear me, you're tragic. I didn't mean to rake you like that. Suppose you sit down again. I'll guarantee the fire is too completely out to be re-kindled."

He dropped into a chair.

"It wasn't—a few minutes ago," he confessed. Then his voice turned grim and bitter. "Perhaps we could stamp on it a little so it will be dead another eight years."

"Stamp away, if it helps you, but I assure you I don't need it," she told him lightly. Then reproachfully she added, "but I am disappointed, Monte, because I do need you as a friend. I don't know to whom else I'll turn."

"I'll never be your friend, Diane, because I've too much cause to be your enemy. A man's first love, provided he has the blessing to lose her, is never quite a woman. She is part angel. She is, let us say, the



idealization of Woman. Not winning her, you could almost consider a man the luckiest chap on earth,—that is if he loses her to someone whom he can consider a worthy, upstanding rival,—which wasn't the way I lost you. For he can carry his ideal with him through life. She will always be young, and ardent, and tender, and good. She will always be beautiful, and wise, a divinity to worship and wonder at, down through the years. The man will always feel himself a little nobler, and worthier, because his divinity once considered him godlike enough to lean down from her high seat in heaven, and to lift him up by her side."

A wry smile was playing about his lips. His companion shot at him the gentle accusation of "Cynic."

"I don't think I'm a cynic, Diane, merely because life has knocked a few scales from my eyes. You see, I can consider quite sympathetically instead of ironically this poor fortunate devil who won the girl from this hypothetical man we are imagining, and married her. He's a good fellow, this man who won, and he undoubtedly felt the same way about the girl he married as did the rival who lost her. She was a goddess, and he was delirious with joy when he captured her. But now, poor chap, the years have brought their inevitable knowledge. You can't cage a goddess under a roof with you and keep her entirely divine. If he's a decent sort, and she's the usual fine woman,—and most women are fine,—they're bound to find a



different love than the one with which they started,—a mingling of affection, and admiration, and loyalty, man to woman and woman to man, which is infinitely better than the one they lost, because more sane and true. But it'll never satisfy them completely. They'll look back on what they lost, and know they've lost it, and want it like the devil."

The woman leaned forward, her eyes intent upon him. "Then the man who lost his goddess ought to have a very kindly feeling toward her."

She rose and stood before him, facing him bravely. "Go on, Monte,—and then?"

"You know the rest. You know all of it. The goddess was not content to turn human. She must drop her wings in slime. If you'd ever been a short sport before,—if I had not known, even after you married Dan, that there was so much that was wonderful in you, perhaps it would not have cut so deeply, when——" He stopped hesitant, but she took up the words where he left them. She was pale and resolute.

"When I offered myself to the man I loved."

"You never did. To the boy who had dared aspire to the best in you, you offered the worst. You broke his faith. And that is why the man who succeeded him will never be your friend."

"More than that. He ought to love her at intervals all his life, if he's lost her as I said, but that isn't the way I lost you. When you decided to marry old Dan

Mayfield, knowing what a rotter the old boy had been all his life, without having a spark of love for him, you killed my goddess, right there. Not only that; for awhile, before I learned better, you killed my ideal of woman. I think I've had time since then to discount, and to forget, whatever sting to my vanity your decision was, though all youngsters are pretty vain. But for the years of cynicism which should have been years of faith, I have you to thank. That rather puts friendship out of the question, doesn't it?"

The woman's voice was low, and protestingly tremulous. "We all suffer hell for our particular sins, Monte."

"And usually we share our hell with the innocent. Of course you suffered. But then, instead of being the thoroughbred that I would have sworn before high heaven you were, you welshed on your bargain. You learned that you'd been mistaken, and that all Dan's millions weren't an adequate price for the privileges which he claimed. You learned you'd lost, and then you wouldn't play the string out. You decided to stick to the millions, despite a pretty fair pre-marriage settlement, as I remember it, cash in advance, as if were——"

He rose from the chair, rigidly white. Years that seem long can be turned back quickly. And the woman again was glad! For the wound had not healed.

"My enemy, Monte?"

"If you will have it so."

"My dearest enemy." She linked her arm in his.  
"Let us find the others. They are undoubtedly in the library."

## CHAPTER IV

THE morning sun was pouring golden rays as heady as wine into the book-lined solitude of Sir Humphrey's study, and a linnet perched upon a bough outside his window was bursting its throat with song, when Europe's greatest mystery stalked in from his "petit déjeuner" of coffee, croissants, and jam, and took the chair before his desk.

The ormolu clock on his mantel struck ten, as it always did when he picked up the typewritten leaflets which lay upon the morning papers close to his right hand. They were part of the labours of Critchlow, his English secretary, methodical as the Bank of England, who had undoubtedly been at work since dawn. Here, condensed in a dozen paragraphs, was the principal financial and political news from the Paris *Temps* and the London *Times*, as well as a radioed report from Sir Humphrey's man in Buenos Ayres. Beside these paragraphs were references by page and column to the newspapers that lay beneath them.

Sir Humphrey's eyes began to scan, and the wheels of his business mind to turn, with the well-trained efficiency of an electric motor, swung into

action at the turning of a switch. A line on his second leaflet made him lay the sheets down and unfold his London paper to page four, column five, midway down. He read:

THE ANGORA ASSEMBLY.

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NUZRI BEY DENOUNCES EUROPEAN IMPERIALISTS;  
ASKS "OPEN DOOR" FOR AMERICA.

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(By Our Special Correspondent.)

Angora, May 10.—Nuzri Bey, leader of the conservative "pro-peace" group in the assembly, created a great clamour in the deliberations of the assembly here to-day, when he declared that "oil grabbing European diplomats" were gradually forcing Turkey to take up arms to defend her sovereignty.

He declared the business firms of Europe were not content to bargain for the privilege of exploiting Turkish resources by strictly business methods, but made a common practice of accompanying their proposals with the pressure of their chancellories, in the forms of ultimata, the sending of troops and war-ships. "We should go further than extending the open door to trade, for which America stands," he said. "We should give preferential treatment to American capital, with which we can do business without losing our independence."

The assembly was in a turmoil before Nuzri finished speaking, cheers from the intransigent nationalists, mingling with cries of "traitor" from his own party benches on the right, where Nuzri's surprising speech is branded to-night as apostasy.



Sir Humphrey smiled grimly as he pressed a buzzer beneath his desk. His secretary entered, his gaunt form bent to its customary deferential crescent-shape.

"Good morning, Critchlow. This Nuzri seems to be an orator of parts."

"He has his talent, sir."

"Is there a Skola munitions salesman in Constantinople?"

"The Armstrong man is there."

"He won't do. We can't have Britain selling arms to British foes. Let Italy do it. They've a man at Belgrade, now. Wire him. Also 'phone Downing Street to have Commander Balke or one of his fire-eaters damn Nuzri's speech in the House of Commons to-night as a 'piece of jolly impertinence.' Make him ask 'whether the British lion is going to take it lying down?' Then wire your traders that when our third Near-East list falls off two points,—no, it will drop three at least,—when it falls two and a half points, to buy it in and wait for the rise. That's all for just now."

The servitor turned to the door. "Very good, sir."

Sir Humphrey called after him, "A press report that half a dozen destroyers are leaving Malta for duty in the Aegean might help."

"Yes, indeed, sir."

Sir Humphrey resumed his reading, flecking off

sheet by sheet into the bronze waste basket by his side. As he finished Critchlow's report, he swept the newspapers after from his desk. A small stack of opened envelopes, from which the corners of their contents protruded, lay at his left. He started through them till one arrested his attention and he pressed the buzzer once more.

"Is Adman here yet?" he asked of his secretary, who appeared as if rubbed from Aladdin's lamp when his fingers had scarcely left the buzzer.

"Yes, sir. In the ante-room."

"Send him in."

A chocolate-coloured Asiatic, clad in frock coat and striped grey trousers, wearing a turban of white upon his head, entered the room, and with a military click of his heels bowed low before the desk.

"Good morning, Adman."

"May sunlight fall upon Effendi's path, all his days, and his feet be set in pleasant places."

"Has Nuzri Bey gone crazy, or is he swung by gold?"

"A little mad perhaps, like all his people. It is the work of that American devil, Starrett."

"He is only mortal, this Starrett. He is subject to all the ills of the flesh."

"He has the gift of angels, an eloquent tongue. I heard him when Kemal was rousing his Kurds, before ever the Greeks were driven from Smyrna, and

Ismet sat parleying with unbelievers, with all pardon to my master."

"He speaks the dialects?"

"Many of them, master. He has lived much in the tents of Arabian sheiks, and in the hovels of Anatolia, adopting strange costumes and manners, and chattering in pigeon tongues. It is his 'hobby.' He knows peoples from Mecca to Tiflis. Some say still farther. And as I say, he talks well."

"What does he say?"

"He says business, always,—and he has for his friends the Christian doctors and teachers to help him with good deeds. I heard him once in a council where Kemal raised twice a hundred soldiers.

"‘Are not all men equal in the eyes of Allah?’ he asked the natives, ‘and are not their properties their own? Why then should the European, who scorns you, who strikes your sons, and who will not be judged in your courts, stay with his aëroplanes and cannon about the mines and fields which are your own? Does he return you profit? The rags on your children’s backs make answer. Freeman, living in a land of freedom, we have heard of your leader Kemal. To you who fight for freedom we talk as brothers. We do not want your lands. We want only pay for our labours. Once you are free and can bargain with what is yours we will bargain together. We will dig the oil, perhaps. But you will share in the wealth that flows. And in the mean-

time, we come with good deeds rather than sticks in our hands. Your children at Akbar have scabs upon their faces. I have a friend, a Christian doctor, in Stamboul. He will not seek to corrupt them, I swear it. But he will come within seven suns and heal them.'

"He would speak thus, and verily, within seven suns the doctor would come with his little black bag and lift the sores from off our children's eyes and faces. One does not fight with such people. They have influence in all that country. So Nuzri speaks for Starrett, when he says, 'let us do business with Americans.' "

"You are grown gentle in your country with your enemies. This Starrett is in surprisingly good health."

"Aye, and more. The assassin, Osman, who was sent for him, now follows him like a dog, and all the world knows that Starrett crossed him over his knee as women do children, and spanked him with his open palm.

"Later he dived into the flooded Maritza and pulled forth Osman's little son, the apple of his eye, and placed him in his mother's arms, so that she says he is a holy man, and must not be harmed. It was Osman who told him of the agreement we made with Salmun's bandits to burn the docks of the American tobacco company at Stamboul, and to harry



their workmen with strikes, and their offices with thefts."

"It is for that I asked you here this morning. You, who were fool enough to sign papers. Is not money in the hand better than promises? Where are the papers now?"

"The devil still has them, but we will get them."

"What? You dog! Did not the fellow pass four frontiers to come to France?"

"His baggage was searched at all four. He was arrested and searched in Italy. He was watched from the night Salmün's strong box was rifled. All his mail has been examined. He has them, and he would not destroy them. But where? Torture will reveal. I will draw his finger-nails out, one by one, some night when he is at home alone."

"He lives with someone?"

"An American youth, an art student, named Redfern, who has a studio on the rue Beethoven, high above the Seine."

"Named what?"

"The name is Redfern, Effendi,—he is but a boy, the concierge tells me. He dabbles in painting and dances at teas."

"You are faithful, Adman, I grant you, but stupid as the brutes. You may go now." Sir Humphrey picked the telephone transmitter from the outstretched hands of a silver nymph beside him. As

the Oriental bowed himself from the room, Critchlow ushered Mrs. Mayfield in.

Her employer was calling the prefect of police, that argus-eyed genius who sits upon the island of *la cité*, and sees into every building of Paris at will. Mrs. Mayfield dropped into a comfortable chair and crossed two shapely yellow wool-clad legs.

She regarded with satisfaction the trimness of the Oxfords which had just reached her that morning from a boot-shop across the ocean in America. From a pocket of her short black knitted sport skirt she drew a tiny yellow silk packet, which when un-snapped revealed a half-dozen gold-tipped cigarettes of diminutive size. Selecting and lighting one, she leaned back, and let the grey smoke seep lazily through her half-open lips, while Sir Humphrey was telephoning. Her tight-fitting jacket of caracul was open at its sable collar, outlining her full white throat. Her cheeks were framed in a rakish coq feather, curling from an impertinent toque of fawn to circle like a question-mark beneath her chin. They held the warm glow of one who had just done her morning two-miles of heel-and-toe striding down the Bois de Boulogne, in tow of a great police dog.

Sir Humphrey was gleaning information about a certain Mr. Redfern, who indeed did study art, and dance at teas, but who took his easel and oils out of Paris frequently. His passports, as seen within the week on the Italian border, had carried the visas of

Greece and Turkey. His baggage included sketches of the quais on Constantinople. Once, when young Mr. Redfern had knocked down a waiter, some time before dawn in a café atop Montmartre, a telephone call from the American military attaché at the embassy to a friend in the prefecture had sent him home unchastened and unrepentant. The police understood that he was a personage of some importance in his native land.

Sir Humphrey hung up the telephone and rose to kiss one hand of his visitor, as it was stretched forth from the warm embrace of little sable cuffs. She smiled up at him archly, as he held her fingers in both of his powerful hands.

"Your dissipations seem to do you no harm," he acknowledged.

"We only danced till two,—at the Abbaye,—the orchestra was good and my partner even better."

"You had danced with him before." It was a plain statement of fact rather than a question, and his shrewd eyes were penetrating deeply into hers.

"I had," she returned, meeting his eyes squarely. "So often that I fear I shall never earn that diamond necklace."

He shrugged his shoulders. "One can never tell about that. The comtesse Vendôme believes she is going to love him. At any rate he is her passing flare, though the fool cannot see it."

"He is no fool."

“Ah! Perhaps you love him yourself? He is an able man. I have more and more proofs of his abilities daily. And you, my dear, are considerable of a woman. But I do not think the match will come off.”

“Why not?”

“Because I have a dictaphone record of your conversation here last night, and before I retired, I studied it thoroughly.”

Mrs. Mayfield rose and faced him, flushing first with embarrassment, then white with anger. “Then I need not have come to report to you.—I did not know I was to be spied upon.—I should imagine confidential missions would end where confidence ends.”

“Pray sit down,—please.” Their wills clashed, and the man who stood on surer ground won. She sank into her chair. “I was present at your talk,—let us put it that way,—I was an unseen listener, because two heads are better than one in dealing with a clever man like Mr. Starrett, or Mr. Carroll,—since you and I know who he is. You have given me invaluable information about him, without reporting to me. And as for my confidence in you,—I have trusted you with secrets of value, have I not?”

He walked back to his desk and pulled from one of its drawers the little box with white satin lining. He unlatched it, and drew out the slender thread of precious metal, weighted with its starry jewels. He



came back, and placed it firmly in one of her hands, and closed her fingers tightly about it.

“There really is no question of bargaining between you and me, my dear friend. I have wanted to make you a present of this,—and since you will not express your gratitude quite as other women,—since you are not at all of the kind of beauties to which we poor rich men are accustomed,—we have played some diplomatic and business games together, so you might—should we call it, earn what I wanted to give you freely. Even now I was about to propose another little service you could do me, if you would. But these things are not to be any longer a matter of pay. You are my friend.—It is a delight for me to give you pretty things to hang upon your beautiful self.—How many favours, and what kind of favours you wish to do for me must be hereafter something for you to decide yourself. They will depend upon how fond of me you really are.”

The Mayfield trembled at the power in his low voice. Again she felt herself drawn to a closer affection at the appeal of his strong personality. She noted this with realization of impending danger. But she was loath to leave him in the face of the gifts he had showered upon her, gifts of the luxury which she loved, she almost believed, as nothing else in the world.

“I’m sorry,” she begged. “What was it you wanted me to do?”

He had released her hand and was smiling wryly. "What little thing?"

Impulsively she placed her hands upon his shoulders. "Close your eyes," she ordered, and as the business Titan obeyed her, she drew his iron grey head down close to her own. As gently and softly as the wings of a butterfly would brush a flower upon which it had but a second's impulse to alight, her warm lips touched his two closed eyelids, and as she dropped her hands from his shoulders and stepped back, he raised his head and regarded her.

"You witch," he said. "I wonder which of us two is really the stronger."

"I am, I think, or I would not venture here. I am really as immoral as you, or so I am told, but my immorality finds vent in luxury alone. What was it you wanted me to do?"

"It really should be very simple. There is a young American named Redfern who is the studio-mate of your friend, Carroll. He has recently been to Constantinople, undoubtedly at the same time as Carroll. Although friends, they travelled separately. Carroll acquired papers of great value which undoubtedly he brought to Paris. His baggage, and his person, and his rooms, have been searched wherever he has been. His mail has been opened. Where are these documents? Probably upon his friend. At two o'clock I will send you a report where

you can find the boy. Will you bring me all the papers in his possession to-night?"

"That should not be hard. Where does he live?"

"With Monsieur Carroll, in a studio at 3, rue Beethoven. But you will not wish to find him there."

The Mayfield gathered her gloves and prepared to depart. "I want Mr. Carroll's address for his sister who is in Paris looking for him. If you will telephone your information about the Redfern youth to my apartment, I will try to bring you what you wish some time before morning."

"I shall expect you." Sir Humphrey bowed her out.

As Mrs. Mayfield crossed the patch of lawn from Sir Humphrey's home to the high, wrought-iron gate at the street, her dog "Baron" bounded clumsily and joyously about her. She tossed a stave of song to the sunlight that bathed her in its warmth, and skipped a frolicking step or two for the dog's amusement.

"What a pretty day for a dark intrigue," she sighed to Baron, leaning over to pat him affectionately. The guardian of the gate tipped his hat with a smile, and she bade him "bon jour." Then she drew a shiny franc from the pocket of her jacket to give his grubby urchin for a sticky "gateau" at a nearby sweet-shop.

"We will take a taxi, Baron," she said, "and ride home by the Tuileries gardens. The tulips there are in bloom." The dog bounded into the car she hailed.

On her ride, she passed the string of diamonds through her hands, and dangled them, sparkling like drops of dew before the dog's admiring eyes.

"Pretty things," she crooned, "how I love you! And what a wonderful old world loaded down with beauty!" Their taxi came to a stop at the Place de la Concorde, to allow a troop of blue bonneted nurses to wheel their well-tucked-in be-ribboned babies across the avenue. The Mayfield watched them with a sudden odd catch in her throat. The shadow of a cloud darkened the sunlight's mirror in her eyes.

"Pretty things," she breathed again, looking back at the children. Her taxi leaped into motion once more. She drew the dog's head down into her lap, and leaning forward stroked his glossy fur with the velvety peach-bloom of her cheek.

"I'd trade you for one of them, Baron," she murmured, "you and the diamonds, and much besides. Does that make you jealous, old dear?"

A low growl answered her, and she sat erect again, laughing as she rumped his ears.

"Don't you fear," she comforted him, though a trace of dew to rival the diamonds clung to her long lashes. "Your only rival thinks I'm a very bad



woman, and perhaps I am a little bad. He's good, Baron."

Her mouth was set in a hard, straight, bitter line. And there was bitterness in her silent reverie all the ride home, so that the dog, sensing her need of sympathy, nuzzled his great head between her woolly knees and murmured a guttural "never-you-care," while his wide eyes paid her devotion.

## CHAPTER V

AT home she flung herself upon a *chaise longue* of purple velour and olive-tinted wood in the fashionable clutter of her Louis Seize salon. She smoked a ruminative cigarette and awaited word from Sir Humphrey. Lysiane brought her mail and the newspapers, but she let them lie untouched upon the tabouret at her side.

She must send her car for Hubert and Monte's sister, and bid them ride the afternoon away until she could join them. She decided she would not join them. A nice girl, Monte's sister, and a splendid fellow, Hubert. With the woman's instinct for match-making, she considered what a charming couple they might make. If they should hit it off together, it would also help to solve one of her problems, which was the "settling" of Hubert without hurting him. She must steer them with all her finesse.

Meanwhile there was her work to consider. She would have to change her clothes, after a bite or two of luncheon. Life was largely made up, it seemed,

of buttoning and unbuttoning, hooking and unhooking, trying on and taking off fine clothes of all varieties. She wondered idly what proportion of her life this would represent if all the scattered hours were joined together and laid end to end till they represented solid years. Too many, that was certain. The women of savage centuries had the better of the moderns, with their seldom changed furs, or their plaited skirts of leaves.

Mrs. Mayfield made of her lips a dainty "O," and launched warm rings of grey smoke into the air, to float from her pillowed head to her outstretched ankles. She wondered if she could ring her toes, but gave up after a few vain attempts. She recalled that Monte's room-mate had taught her to blow rings, so that she could blow them teasingly before Monte's scandalized eyes. What a Puritan he always had been,—for her. He had placed her on an uncomfortable pedestal.

She ordered luncheon and returned to thoughts of dressing. Yes, the ancients were better off, but not the barbarous tribes. For dresses of leaves must have been scratchy. And while furs were very well in their way, she doubted if they would be as comfortable with primitive methods of curing as with modern refinements, and lined with silks. The ladies of Greece were better off, with single tunics, caught at the shoulders with brooches. And the dancing unclad nymphs of mythical Arcady were best off of

all. She would like to have been a nymph, she dreamed, dropping the remains of her cigarette into an ash-tray by her side. She fell into a reverie close to sleep, in which she was a nymph on a larch-decked hill, with a little stream gurgling down through a meadow in its centre. She was dancing in tantalizing flight, but with never a care whether caught or not, before a funny bearded little man with legs like a goat's, who played upon two reeds, and who wore behind the mask of beard the laughing face of Monte Carroll, her ancient playmate of the New England lakes.

She awoke. She shook herself erect with a nervous laugh, and struck the silver gong that stood on top of the tabouret.

Lysiane was entering with her luncheon, and upon the tray was a letter neither stamped nor sealed, with her name across its stiff white surface in Sir Humphrey's handwriting. She read it while she ate.

Charles Redfern, jr., it told her, was twenty-four years old, and a student of painting at the École des Beaux Arts, which he attended but little, although his work was creditable and he seemed devoted to it. He spent much of his time travelling, sketching and painting. When in Paris, he idled like most of his comrades a great deal in the side-walk cafés of the boulevards, talking gay talk in the midst of friendly tobacco smoke. He was well provided with funds, and his "aperitif hour" was usually spent at the



American bar of the Hotel St. James et d'Albany on the rue de Rivoli. Here he exchanged sporting gossip with Louis, the bar-tender, and a group of cronies of his own age or a little older, well-heeled Americans like himself, in France partly for study and partly to enjoy life.

Among them, he played five-franc poker some evenings in a secluded corner of the Café du Dome, on Montparnasse, and was not averse to a gay revel every now and then with the sirens of Montmartre.

Mrs. Mayfield recognized his type at once. Paris abounded in likeable, well-groomed American youths, trained to clean sports and vaulting ambitions by their universities, riotous with animal spirits and good nature, and often easy prey to the seductive leisure and play of Paris. How lightly these young Americans floated on the bubbles of the city's mirth. They never dreamed of the griefs too deep for tears which lay like dark subterranean rivers far beneath them. Perhaps it was in revenge for their lightness that Paris laid hands on their hearts with its exquisite beauty, so that many drank deeply of forgetfulness, and never cared to return to their homes, and their sons swelled the armies of the tricolour.

Mrs. Mayfield called Henri Bezanne on the telephone, her "cher Henri," the mad painter, the wistful poet, whose triumphs with brush and pen drew men to him when he wanted solitude, and whose vagaries repelled them when he yearned for friends.

He had been devoted to her since he painted her for the salon, though he beat his spirit against the net of allurements she had cast over him as a caged bird beats against the bars that hold him.

"I need your help, Henri," she called to him over the wire.

"I am drowning in work," he said, "but I would stop to paint you, my picture of 'Love Awakening,' for which I have prayed to you. Are you still unrelenting?"

"You shall have the picture, Henri, when love awakens. And I am fond of you, you know."

"Even as you are fond of life, and all living things, Madame. I would have the picture before I die."

"Perhaps, Henri,—who knows?" The blood raced hot in Mrs. Mayfield's cheeks. "Shall I see you this afternoon?"

"If you command, most hard of heart."

"I don't command. I request, that you go to the bar of the Hotel St. James et d'Albany. There you will probably find a young American named Charles Redfern, a pupil of yours undoubtedly, at the Beaux Arts."

"I know him. He wastes talents given by God. But he is a likeable savage."

"You will find him there about four-thirty, and I will come a little later. You will introduce me to him, and soon afterward leave us, and if you do this

little thing for me I will come to your studio within two days, and you may paint me, as much as you like, within reason."

Agreed. She put the telephone back upon its hook, then rang up Mr. Mainwaring. He was her devoted servant, he assured her. He would take Miss Carroll riding, and do any other errand, until five o'clock, then tea at the Ritz and await her. He acknowledged that he was deserving of gratitude. As Mrs. Mayfield hung up her receiver, she was suffused by a distinct feeling of friendliness for this suitor, "the most manageable" person in the world. But his stock as a prospective husband had dropped still further from its already humble quotation. She would always consider Hubert a dear, and she would view with equanimity his marriage to Miss Carroll, a good girl who would some day do credit to the peerage.

She rose and stretched her slender frame its farthest, with her finger-tips high above her rumped coiffure. A little cat nap would not have been unwelcome, she realized, with the windows open wide to the fragrant out-doors, and cheerful coals in the grate close by. But life presses on too sternly at times. She walked to her boudoir and asked Lysiane to help her. As the girl was busy with her hooks and eyes, her buttons and laces, Mrs. Mayfield sighed, "You are a great comfort to a lazy person, Lysiane."

"It is my work, and Madame is good to me."

"It is so much easier to be nice to people. I tea with a boy this afternoon, a nice American boy, unspoiled and sweet."

"Then Madame will wear a clinging frock, say the black georgette."

"You can even think for me, Lysiane,—the last refinement. And you can bring my squirrel cape, the grey one."

Again the Amazon in her tent was preparing for combat. And when her armour was all girded on, she twirled before the pier glass. "You darling," she said to her reflection in the mirror, "you do match the spring-time, don't you."

"Madame is vain," criticized Lysiane.

"I am, a little," she laughed, "and yet I know one man who would not take me as a gift."

"Such a stupid one!" Lysiane immediately sprang to her defence.

"And to him I could be even sweeter than I look." She jerked her gloves on viciously. "Au revoir," she said, and sallied forth into the sunshine.

Behind the door that closed, Lysiane picked up her mistress's scattered belongings. Then she knelt for a moment upon a "prie-dieu" before a suspended figure of the Son of God, which Madame had brought home because it was very ancient and had cost a great deal of money. Lysiane said a little



prayer for Madame, who trod such perilous paths with such fragile and perishable beauty.

Meanwhile the Mayfield was speeding in a taxicab along the banks of the Seine, past the splendid gardens of the Trocadéro down to the Place de la Concorde, through an avenue lined eight-deep with budding trees, across the great square where the cities of France sat looking down from their queenly pedestals, and flashing by the colonnades of the rue de Rivoli. Pedestrians leaped to avoid on-rushing death. Her driver twirled his car in incredible feats of steering, in and out of trucks and limousines and autobuses and other taxis which knew no law but that of the swift, and the alert to dodge. The horns of vehicles tooted in merry staccato blasts like those of small boys upon a perpetual holiday.

She descended the three steps from the corridor of the Hotel St. James et d'Albany to its cool shaded bar, with its settees of comfortable plush, and its oaken tables, and thick yielding carpet, pleasantly secluded by curtains of lace from the busy sidewalk in view. There was her "cher Henri," his long hair more awry than usual. His horn-glasses were perched on his nose at a slippery angle with their black ribband dangling, and both his hands were gesticulating above two mobile shoulders. A clean-cut, handsome youth sprawled in a fauteuil across the table from him, and regarded his smoking

cigarette stub intently. Mrs. Mayfield swept down upon them.

Both men rose. Mrs. Mayfield greeted the artist, with a "My good friend," and a cordial clasp of the hand.

"One of my talented idlers," Bezanne motioned to the boy. "I plead with him to work. Monsieur Redfern by name. And this, Monsieur, is Madame Mayfield, the most beautiful woman in the world, who has been immortalized in oils by Bezanne."

"I'm glad to see you. I've seen Henri's picture," said the youth, "and the one by Galuppi, but they don't do you justice." His eyes smiled frank flattery, the spontaneous tribute of youth.

"More than justice," she deprecated, "they do me mercy. Is this the store where one buys highballs?" She dropped into an armchair which the youth pulled forward.

"This is the place," young Redfern agreed, and he called the waiter to serve them.

They were friends within half-an-hour. Bezanne was moody, and they chaffed him together, the pupil with the irreverence of youth, despite the respect he paid to the genius of the craft he loved; Mrs. Mayfield gently, tempering her gibes with swift gestures of apology and affection. He drank too much of the Anglo-Saxon's liquor, whisky and soda, no drink for the wine-nourished Latin, so that at last he stared

at them both through an impenetrable blue fog of gloom. Mrs. Mayfield took him to a taxi, and ordered the driver to take him home, by force if necessary. She promised she would see him the next day, and tenderly brushed her lips across his sensitive fingers as she said "au revoir."

"Strange genius," said her new-found friend, when she returned to the table. "For all his deathless works, he'll probably die drunk in a gutter somewhere, if he doesn't hang himself."

A shudder of horror shook the woman. "Don't talk of it like that," she begged. "They do sometimes die drunk in gutters, or mad in asylums, these artists. And our irreproachable world laughs contemptuously at them."

"Well really," protested the western youth. "They are not geniuses because of their dissipation, but in spite of them."

"I don't know," she confessed helplessly, "only my heart aches for Henri and his kind. They're not masters of themselves as we are. They seem to be possessed by some force too powerful for them. It seems to tear them to pieces. They're such easy prey to things we beat so easily, because their natures are more delicate. A violin is more easily wrecked than a locomotive, and infinitely more wonderful."

Young Redfern laughed. "But it's the locomotives that pull the world."

The Mayfield shook her head. "It's the violins that make the world worth pulling."

They laughed in unison at the futility of arguments, and the youth ventured, "We get along pretty well together. I think we should have another drink."

"Oh, four is plenty, at one sitting. You are idle for awhile?"

"For the rest of the evening, if you will."

"Perhaps I will, I have restless feet to-day. Would you like to go up the hill to Sacré Cœur and see the sunset, over the city?"

"I certainly would, and then take you to dinner and dance on Montmartre."

He called for the check, and Mrs. Mayfield opened her bag.

"You must," she said, as he demurred at the note she tossed on the table. "I am really disgustingly wealthy, and I know students. I was on an allowance once myself."

He chuckled. "I've rich and careless parents," he informed her. "You may have heard, Charles Redfern of the Gulf."

He spoke the name of his father proudly, as one speaks of heroes. When they went to the street together he opened the door of a waiting taxi. Inside, she sank into a far corner, and watched him as he chattered, obviously entertaining her, and delighted



with the rôle, as young men always are with pretty women older than they.

Strong, and virile, enthusiastic and handsome,—and young! Oh, pitifully young, she appraised him, beside the old-worldly-wise youth of the continent. But cleaner and more hopeful! Sir Humphrey had said he would be carrying valuable papers, and Sir Humphrey seldom erred in his intuitions and information. She would take them away from him. She felt a surge of hot resentment at the unevenness of the conflict, the unfairness of life.

It was the same swift, red rage that had blinded her eyes back in war-times, when she used to stand before her canteen in the reserve areas of a great battle, and see the care-free, jaunty young striplings, singing their way to their baptism of slaughter.

So helpless and unknowing were they, in the grip of senile and cynical plotters, who sat comfortably in their decay far behind those engines of war that maimed, and blinded, and strangled all these ripe youth, who lured the young men on to serve their greeds with cleverly wrought slogans of glory, which when the dirty work was done would be as by-words and mockeries, who seduced mere boys to cut-throat heroisms by bribes of two-penny ribbons, and crosses to stick on their coats.

Rage at the gamblers who could not lose, because they gambled other men's lives and fortunes, at the

doddering Midases who always won because they had sold their munitions to both sides of the conflict; and when it was over would patch up a compromised peace to suit their purposes, regardless of the victors and vanquished; rage at the great European industrialists who sat behind their diplomatic lackies; financial giants like Sir Humphrey Leinster, of dubious race, piling up wealth which they could not spend, drunk on power and riches.

Mrs. Mayfield knew their power, for she served Sir Humphrey's business. But as she leaned back in her corner of the taxi-cab and watched young Redfern, she hated the old men's world. "They've corrupted me," she acknowledged to herself, "with the gowns and furs and jewels. But I'm not all theirs yet. I wonder if I ever will escape them?" Her mind roved to Monte Carroll. Thence back to the work in hand. This boy had Monte's papers, which she would turn over to Sir Humphrey before morning.

It was an easy thing to do. . . .

They stood upon the summit of Sacré Cœur, and watched the sun descend, a globe of fire, and its after-glow colour the sky with all the gorgeous banners of God's invisible battalions. They saw the twilight settle over a proud and beautiful city, and its arches and spires and domes, flung high to honour the memories of little strutting monarchs or magnificent

faiths, shrouded alike a lingering moment in dusk, vanish at last into the inevitable night. They saw the city's lights come out, and brighten against the increasing blackness, hung in long lines that crossed and turned, and grouped in circles and squares, like the lanterns of an unlimited fête. The strains of music, the hum of voices, the staccato notes of horns, and all the sound of hurrying night-life were borne to them on a crisp fresh wind. And for every lantern of ruddy gold that man had hung on the broad black expanse far beneath them, nature had hung a hundred others of pure, cool silver in the high whirling dome of blue above their heads, to guide the steps of the white clad moon now starting her evening stroll.

They supped in a cellar poorly lighted with candles, but merrily noisy with chatter and the rattle of plates, and the "pop" of opening bottles, where an open coffin and gruesome skeletons stood before them, the merry-makers' taunt at death. They drank a warm, ruby Burgundy, that made them tingle from head to feet, and the youth drank far more deeply than he had any idea beneath the careful ministrations of his stealthily temperate companion. Then out into the stars again, arm in arm, the young man singing snatches of a song he had learned in an ivy-clad school hall, far across the ocean, and the woman

stopping him to point to the Milky Way, and to quote, "The heavens declare the glory of God."

He capped her line soberly, "and the firmament showeth His handiwork."

Then they laughed together for no reason at all, and he hugged her arm close to his side. They were two old friends, and they were glad they were both Americans together.

Then they went to dance at a cabaret close to the evil white lights of the Place Pigalle. Their young rushing bloods beat one upon the other as they swayed in time to the negroid rhythms, coaxed and beaten from string and brass and taut-strung drums by slick-haired youths from the East Side of New York, who sang through their noses the sentimental obscenities of Montmartre's gutter poets. They laughed at the ponderous allurements of over-fleshed harlots, working desperately for bits of change from tipsy tourists, and speculated with involuntary sympathy as to the length of life of grisettes in their slender "teens," as fragile and pretty and meltingly tender as ever were broken upon the wheel of man's lusts.

They drank more wine, till young Redfern's head was reeling, and he smiled apologetically. "Let's go out and get the air," he suggested. They entered a taxi, after Mrs. Mayfield agreed to a spin up the Champs Elysées. Whirling away in their dark cab, she saw that the boy was swaying.



She clasped his hand. "Sick?" she queried with an understanding smile.

"I've had about enough. Y'must have hollow legs."

She laughed, and put one arm around him. "You're such a nice boy," she said. "I believe I'll grant you one shoulder." She unhooked her squirrel cape, and let it fall away from the arm that held him. Tenderly she drew down his head with her other hand, and pillowed it upon the perfumed warmth of her bosom.

He murmured sleepily, "Y're good sport, aren't you,—mighty nice t'me."

She drew her cape around in front of her to shield him from the coolness of the night, and clasped him more closely.

For blocks they rode, while young Redfern breathed deeply in semi-stupor, his hot cheek cushioned upon her breast, that rose and fell evenly. With her strong arm and lithe body she broke the shocks which their taxi speeding over broken pavements might give to his slumber. His hand that rested in her lap crept up to nestle beside her face in a sleepy caress. Suddenly he started up.

"Gotta get home," he muttered thickly. "G'important messages."

"Tell me where you live and go back to sleep," she offered him. "I'll get you there feeling fit."

Here, wait a bit." She fumbled in an inner pocket of her cape, and drew out a dainty silver flask as big as her palm. "I'm going to take a bit of this. It's pre-war whisky, and it'll brace you up." She unscrewed the cap and questioned. "Excuse me, please?" She threw back her head as she lifted the flask, but her tongue was tightly in its mouth as she tipped it up. "Better had,——" she advised, offering it to him.

"A—right," he grinned, taking it. "One lit'l drink won' do us any harm." He drank a huge gulp, choked, and gave her the flask. "Four rue Beethoven," he told her. "You tell'm." Then he settled back to sleep upon her shoulder. Within a minute, he had fallen relaxed, in a dead coma.

"Poor baby," she murmured pityingly, and slid him back against the cushions of the cab. With prodding fingers she explored his body, and they at once struck the outlines of a hard package. She ran her nimble fingers through his overcoat, coat, and vest, then unbuttoned the waistcoat and shirt. Strapped beneath one arm-pit was a little cloth bag, flat and hard. She dug into her hand-bag and extracted tiny scissors. She snipped the cords that held the bag, then cut it open. Here, as Sir Humphrey had prophesied, were papers, and by the dim light from recurrent street corners she examined them sufficiently to see that they were beyond doubt what he

wanted. She carefully buttoned the youth's clothing, and rapped on the window, giving the driver his address.

Then with the packet in her bosom, where but a few moments before his head had rested, she drew her cape about her and sat back silently until the course was run.

The rue Beethoven is a blind alley, running from the quai de Passy upon the Seine some fifty yards back to a high wall, above which are perched the sumptuous apartments favoured most by the smartest English colony. But the buildings in the alley are more humble. They house a group of artists, whose studio windows give interesting glimpses of the tree-lined Seine. The taxi rolled into the alley and turned around.

"Help me," Mrs. Mayfield ordered the driver. Between them they lifted the youth to the sidewalk, thence to the care of the concierge, shuffling out drowsily in his slippers to answer the call of their bell.

Mrs. Mayfield re-entered her vehicle, and gave Sir Humphrey's address. As they rolled to the corner, she saw a tall, broad-shouldered, well-remembered figure come striding up to the turn. Her face was in the window, but she drew back into the shadows as she realized the street light beat squarely upon her.

Her heart leaped. Had he recognized her?

A hundred yards away she leaned from the window and looked back. Monte Carroll was still standing beneath the light, gazing after her vanishing taxi.



## CHAPTER VI

HE had seen her.

For a long moment her heart seemed to constrict, and she rocked dizzily, till the taxi seemed slipping away beneath her. She had a vague sense that it was carrying her body along with it, but was leaving her real self somewhere behind it, suspended oddly in empty space. Lights danced insanely before her eyes and she was cold. She steadied herself with a grasp of the window sill. Then sensitive to the cool breeze, she clasped her cloak about her throat. But her cheeks suffused and burned.

A dry sob racked her throat. And she was staring straight into a scene in which she was the leading actress, a scene of seduction and robbery in a whirling taxi, with a helpless, good-hearted boy for victim, and a hardened, avaricious, worldly woman batten-  
ing upon him. She was looking at herself with eyes widened in horror, revealed to herself in the deed she had done, through the pitiless lenses of shame.

She recoiled at the vision. With lips that writhed,

she murmured a "no" of protest. She could not have done that. But the packet of papers that weighed like a solid rock upon her beating heart, threatening to stifle it into stilled submission, answered her, "yes—you did—you did." She was lashed by the whips of remorse.

She had taken a boy who was bearing the trust of a friend. She had eaten of his bread, and drunk of his wine. Then she had lured him to a place alone, and robbed him of that which he held dearer than money, papers that were the symbol of man's recognition that he had arrived at man's estate, and could take care of himself.

Now she was speeding toward her employer on this fiendish errand, with the spoils hugged tight to her body. Her clenched fist pressed hard against the package, and her nails dug deep in the flesh of her palms.

She rallied herself to defend her respect. "I've never felt this way before," she thought, "I'm a fool. The world is hard, and I've fought it hard, a woman against wolfish men, and I've won."

But even as she argued she was battered by the reply of truth, that this time she had fought no worldly sensualist, no unscrupulous trader, bent on lightening his leisure by degrading her. She had defrauded a boy who sought of her only companionship in play.

"I can't,—I can't," she moaned. She ripped the package from her bosom and hurled it into a far corner of her taxi. But even as she protested, she knew that she would see this errand through to its conclusion, and the vista of others like it arose before her.

She hammered upon the window in front of her, and the driver slowed the car. She leaned out the door, and changed the address from Sir Humphrey's to her own.

"This is the last," she said. The road seemed interminable until she could reach the friendly doorway of her home. At last she was there. She picked up the hateful package and rushed to the calming solitude of her boudoir. How comfortable it was! She yearned to stay in it for always, hidden from the prying eyes of the world, which surely must read her shame.

She rang furiously for Lysiane. A silver chime told her the hour. Only twelve o'clock, for all the sickening tragedy of a day that seemed years long. She stood as if dazed, facing the door, clutching the package of letters in her hand, till Lysiane entered in bath-robe and night-cap.

The maid stopped, startled at her mistress's mien. "Madame," she cried. "You are ill."

Mrs. Mayfield half wept, half laughed. "I am ill at heart, Lysiane. I have done the vilest thing."

The other woman swept forward and caught her in her arms. "Mais non, Madame, mais non! You could not."

But Mrs. Mayfield cried, "Mais oui, Lysiane! Nothing to hurt myself. But I have hurt a child. I am a bad woman, Lysiane."

The maid was stroking her hair, and holding her fevered forehead to her shoulder.

"You could not be bad, my lamb. Have I not lived with you these many years? Hurts come to children as the days come, and are as quickly forgotten. It is that Madame has broken a heart, is it not? Hearts are mended soon."

Mrs. Mayfield drew away, and in her voice was wearied sadness. "It is not that, and hearts are not mended soon. Will you pour my bath? I am vile."

She dropped the packet from her hand to the dressing-table, and fumbled at the hooks of her frock. She gazed into the mirror, and her hand clenched her throat. She was old, this woman who stared back at her, and she had seen sorrows.

The routine, necessary movements of her hands unfastening her dress were distractions to ease her suffering. She could think more clearly now, with the music of running water in the bathroom, and the accustomed Lysiane ministering deftly and softly to her.



She could not palliate her offence. It was the lowest deed of which she had ever been guilty.

She thought back to the act which had brought her the scorn of Monte Carroll, her loveless marriage as a girl to the loathsome, money-laden old roué, Dan Mayfield. That marriage at least had ignorance to excuse it.

And that foolish impulse which had turned Monte's scorn to hatred, when the burden of her life with Dan had seemed greater than she could bear,—whatever the strict moralists might say of it,—she, knowing that she had courted an illicit romance with the man of whom fate had robbed her, would never blame herself for wanting it and seeking it. She would only blame herself for the blunder worse than sin, of under-estimating Monte, and thinking he would share in clandestine adultery. She had not known men very well at nineteen or she never would have gauged wrongly the boy who had loved and lost her.

(To those who grope their way from wrong to right and back to wrong again, buffeted one way and kicked another by sportive desires far bigger than they, which play with them from that helpless day of their conception till they die, some spirit of infinite pity has provided a blessed drug. It is called self-justification.

"Come now," whispers the drug to their brains, creeping through all the veins made feverish by

shame, and cooling, calming them. "You really aren't so bad. Were not the circumstances thus and so? And what is bad? And what is good? Who knows?"

A marvel of nature, this, to prevent men leaping off high cliffs, and drowning themselves in black, deep rivers to escape that terrible angel with the sword of fire, or if you will, that damnable devil with his three sharp prongs, which men call conscience.)

The healing drug was beginning to seep through Mrs. Mayfield's wearied brain by the time she again sat at her dressing-table preparing for her visit to Sir Humphrey. "I don't mean to do wrong," she reasoned, "but life is difficult."

The disgust at her evening's revelation of whither life had carried her was too strong, too recent, however, to be downed so easily. And her shame at having been discovered by the one man before whom she longed to redeem herself swept over her in hot, mortifying waves. Monte had seen her. He knew.

"How could I have done it?" she asked. She began diligent search for the devil who had tempted her.

"This is the last errand I will do for Sir Humphrey."

She opened her jewel box to bring forth a strand of emeralds to hang about her neck. Her fingers closed on a glistening handful, and she raised it up before the mirror so that the jewels sparkled in the reflected

lights like a fistful of star-dust, caught in a cluster of flowers.

And the eyes of the tempter whom she sought gleamed out from between her white fingers. She almost sobbed as she drew the jewels to her lips, and held them before her eyes, balancing them this way and that to catch each varied brilliance.

"You beauties, how I love you!" she whispered. She let them slide through her fingers to the table. Then she drew out tiny boxes and trays from the plush lined casket. She emptied them of rings, of brooches, and of bracelets, a coronet of diamonds, and a long rope of creamy pearls. There they lay, all scattered upon the table, as they often did, so that she could gloat over them and caress them.

But now a pale, tense resolution was driving the flush from her cheeks. She was done with the life that had earned her most of them, and the deep, undeniable thirst for self-approval, for rehabilitation of her self-respect, was welling up within her. Her soul craved penance as a sun-parched desert traveller craves water, and the way was open before her. She would perform the ancient purifying rite of sacrifice, to which men have always turned ever since all men were children wandering in a strange new world, wondering at the sun and rocks and trees. And in the act of sacrifice she would exorcise the evil spirit that had brought her downfall.

She ran her fingers through the jewels, smoothing them, stroking and rattling them. Then she began to separate them to the right and left. The right hand pile was large. It contained the gems that Sir Humphrey had given her. They must go back to him. She was done with the life that had earned them. The left hand mound had been given her by Dan Mayfield, and she was through with that life too. But jewels were jewels, and humans are humans, and while women may seek saintly lives, all life is compromise. Dan was dead. His gifts did not matter. She took the jewel casket, and dropped the left hand pile into it.

"Lysiane," she summoned, "bring a paper and string and wrap this up." The maid wonderingly obeyed, while her mistress stood silent, eyes staring, lips parted, and breathing quickly. A horrible ache was at her heart. She was half regretful and holding back an impulse to stay the hand which was wrapping that bundle. Her jewels! No longer hers.

Then she telephoned Sir Humphrey. She told him that she had his papers, and that if he would send his car to her home she would come to him with them.

The car sounded its signal in the driveway below. She was ready, in a gown of white, even as a little girl goes to her first communion, with white lights shining in her eyes, and her soul uplifted.



A great fire roared in the massive fireplace of Sir Humphrey's study, making a pleasant, flickering twilight in its darkness, and warming it comfortably, although the tall French windows opening on the garden balcony were thrown wide for the freshness of out-doors to enter. Before the fire two high-backed armchairs were drawn companionably close, and between them, outlined against the blaze, Sir Humphrey received her. He was clad as always irreproachably. Two black pearls shone sombrely against the whiteness of his shirt front. Only a single small desk lamp added to the illumination of the room, with its little disk of suspended white, which broadened as it fell upon a slender row of books held in brackets, and the gleaming mahogany table-top. The room held an air of intimate friendliness, and Sir Humphrey, stepping forward, hands out-stretched in proffer of help in removing Mrs. Mayfield's cape, was greeting her as an old, warm friend.

"As beautiful and successful as ever," he told her. "I see you come heavily laden."

She smiled sadly, as her cape slipped off into his hands. "I am heavily laden to-night, Humphrey, more than you know."

He chaffed at her melancholy. "So young for a woman of sorrows. I have asked Saki to prepare us sandwiches and champagne and perhaps together we can cheer you up."

He accepted the packet of papers which she thrust into his hand. "If these are what I think they are I certainly am grateful to you."

She sank into one of the chairs, holding her jewel casket on her lap. Sir Humphrey sat in the other, which he drew toward her. He pulled out the papers from his package and examined them silently, one by one, laying them each on the floor before him.

"A youthful country, yours," he said, "and amazingly strong in its youth. It is just learning that sometimes the success of trade is helped by a little world politics, and sometimes furthered by the use of such unbusinesslike weapons as warships and marines." He was studying one paper intently. "I think if this paper, which never should have been written, goes no further than this room, it may not call forth the cruiser or two and the 'devil dogs,'—you call them 'devil dogs,' do you not?—to make the long voyage to the East that might be likely if it should fall into the hands of your State Department."

Mrs. Mayfield said nothing. What a revelation Sir Humphrey was she was thinking, of the great alliance of finance and diplomacy.

A Japanese man-servant entered noiselessly, bearing a small table, which he set between them. He retired and brought in the silver trays of sandwiches, with caviar and a pomegranate jelly. He brought a

bronze pail of ice whence emerged the napkin cloaked bottle Sir Humphrey had ordered.

“Good evening, Saki,” Mrs. Mayfield greeted him, as one old friend to another, “will you bring me a footstool?” The servant placed a hassock beneath one pointed toe and high heel, while she settled herself more comfortably, one of her knees thrown over the other, and her silken ankles gleaming in the firelight.

“Let’s save the feast till later,” she said, “I want to talk a little.” Sir Humphrey motioned the Japanese out, and leaned toward her deferentially. “Talk, dear lady,” he begged, “and if it is something in which I can help,—” A gesture gave answer.

He fumbled in his waistcoat for a flat gold case enclosing matches, and drawing his chair close to the hearth, picked up the fallen papers one by one. He set them alight, each in its turn, holding them like blazing torches in his hands till the flames approached his fingers. Then he dropped the char-black, spark-laden ashes upon the hearth, to writhe their last in the heat, and lie brittle and dead.

“I did my last business errand for you to-night, Humphrey,” Mrs. Mayfield said. “And you’ve been such a good friend to me that it’s very difficult to tell you why, and to break off.”

“I am sorry,” he replied. “Is it necessary to break off?”

"Absolutely,—will you give me one of your cigarettes, please?—For to-night I did the worst thing I have ever done in my life,—I robbed an unsuspecting boy who had been entertaining me. I would not have believed it of myself, a little while ago. But since then,—thanks."

She leaned forward and inhaled the soothing flow of blended tobacco smoke as her cigarette tip flamed on his offered match. Then she settled back once more to gaze into the fire, and to watch her exhaled cloud of blue, caught in the draught, go swirling up the chimney.

"Since doing that," she resumed, "I have had a vision of where this life I lead, of luxury and intrigue, is taking me. And I don't like it. Or perhaps I like it so much that I'm afraid of it. At any rate, I am going to quit it. And since I will be of no more use to you, I am bringing you back some of the things you have given me, so you will not have lost anything on me,—for I like you, Humphrey,—and so we may quit even."

She unwrapped her package and opened the lid, and placed it in his lap. "I know you meant them as gifts," she said, "but if you don't mind, I'd rather not keep them."

Sir Humphrey wasted scarcely a glance upon them. His eyes were boring into the woman before him, shrewdly noting each agitated self-betrayal, and the wearied sadness that was be-clouding her eyes. He



placed the casket on the floor at her feet. Then he rose and stood before her, his back to the fireplace, with hands clasped behind him.

“Even if you were determined to go away and never see me again—and I am sure I have done nothing to merit that,—I see no reason why you should return these trinkets which I have taken pleasure in giving you, and which you have taken pleasure in wearing. We are not enemies, but friends, are we not?”

“You mean to be my friend, Humphrey, but circumstances make you my enemy. Not you, but the temptations you represent. I don’t wish to hurt you, and I’m afraid you won’t understand.”

“I haven’t built my fortunes on stupidity.”

“I know that. Well then, perhaps you may understand, and I’ll tell you. When I first knew you I had a modest fortune, and I had the thrifty care for the future which I’ve inherited from hard working people, not to spend it. But I was alone in the world, and loneliness is the most terrible of all afflictions. I craved excitement, gaiety, and friends. They cost money. And you helped provide it. I craved luxury, and you helped give me it. But luxury is a growing appetite. It is more insidious and just as deadly, I’ve come to think, as the appetite for any other drug. I believe it’s infinitely easier to economize from two meals a day to one, than from

two automobiles to one. And every diamond that one puts on her finger, to sparkle and shine, is a call for another for the throat or wrist. I've seen a woman buying her one party gown of the year, and seen her happy as if she were getting a husband, but I never saw a woman buying her twenty-seventh who cared very much about it. Her eyes are roving the mannequins' forms for the colour and shape of her twenty-eighth."

Sir Humphrey chuckled, "So you have decided to turn to the simple life,—my dear lady, why mortify the flesh? You were not made for sackcloth."

"Not at all. I would hate the simple life. If ever a woman lived who loved luxury, I am that woman. You men can never dream how I want it, or how I revel in it. Every refinement of living that I can find, I want. All the comforts, all the decorations, all the satisfactions of exquisite food and drink, all the beauties of clothes and jewels, all the scents of perfumes and the sounds of music, all the excitements of all our emotions, all the devices which man has invented to lull our troubled bodies, all the diversions of entertainment and thought and pleasant conversation,—everything in life in which one can loll and stretch and be happy as a cat before a fire, I want—and I intend to have."

Sir Humphrey's reply was short and to the point.

"And that leads you right back to me or to some other man."

“Well,—not to you, Humphrey. Because under the conditions of my association with you I miss the greatest luxury of all, the luxury of peace of conscience. I ply a trade of seduction, but one step higher than that of the courtesans,—perhaps not even as high,—for I cheat always, whereas they return pay for pay. I have not minded much until to-night. I’ve rather taken pleasure in pitting my wits against men who were pitted against me. But to-night was different, and my moral sense,—you don’t have to laugh,—there is such a thing as moral sense,—and mine had become so blunted by what I have been doing that I did something so vile it will torture me for a long, long time. In brief, I am ashamed of my trade, and I’m going to leave it.”

Sir Humphrey’s shoulders shrugged, but his eyes were deadly serious. “A conscience is no luxury, Madame. It is an annoying necessity with most men because of their early education at the hands of women and priests. The luxury is in having none.”

“The luxury is in having one that is clear, a luxury only the fortunate can afford.” Mrs. Mayfield hurled her cigarette stub into the flames for emphasis.

Her companion stepped close to her and towered high above her, looking down gently. “The young American whom you used to know,—you are in love with him once more, is it not so?”

“I am in love with no one. I am fond of him,

even as I am fond of you." Mrs. Mayfield lied, a small white untruth.

"I wonder." The rich man leaned down and lifted her feet from the hassock. "May I sit at your feet, dear lady? I want to tell you a story,—I'll play jester or troubadour to your troubled queen." He sat down and looked up at her drooping lashes with a quizzical twist at the corners of his mouth. "It's a long story," he warned her. "You don't mind?"

By the instinct of women Mrs. Mayfield knew the climax of his story, even before it began. She had the impulse to escape it, but was too weary to flee.

"I'm glad you've quit the trade," he said, "for I've known a long time you were different from the comtesse de Vendôme, and those others. For awhile, I rated you all together, with only your beauty outshining them. You will remember when that was. But since then, I have been waiting for you to tell me approximately what you have said to-night. Of late I've been impatient for it. But years have taught me to wait for what I want.

"Neither you nor anyone else has ever quite understood me, and I've taken first class care that no one should. A man who veils himself in mystery is always endowed with greater strength than one whose character is known. So I've paid well at times for silence. I have no friends but you and my secretary and Saki, and not a relative in the world.



“And I am rich,—richer than men dream. I am powerful,—more powerful than anyone knows. But once I was poor, and my rise to riches began when I was a very small boy, and saw my mother bowled over by the carriage of a prince. He paid for her funeral, out of his royal bounty. I remember the white shrouded figure in the darkened room, between four flickering candles. I can even recall clinging to it and crying, when a man in a black gown pulled me away. Well, the prince is dead, too. And I own his petty kingdom. His son is in debt to me for all he has.

“How was it all done? By trading, and gambling with the devil’s own luck and advance information always. My father was a Greek, and the Greeks have always been traders. He died before my mother, and I can only remember what she told me about him. Mine is an American career in the old world, adapted to old world practices. I am what your countrymen call self-made, and still in the making, for I am young enough even now to have ambitions.

“You and I seek the same things in life. We wish to drain life as one drains a glass of golden wine; not brusquely, but staying to inhale the bouquet, watch its little jewels form and rise and disappear; to taste, and in tasting to whet the sense for a deep, long draught that shall satisfy the thirst aroused. We wish life’s luxury, that which I saw

going by,—far, far above me as a little boy, and vowed I'd have.

“Well, I've fought for it, by force and intrigue, with whatever weapon came to hand, the long, uneven fight of a peasant rising in one brief life to the top of Europe's age-hardened society. No matter how.

“I don't want to weary you with details. But I've learned the one thing man will always buy. I've made it and sold it to him. I learned that whatever else in life may vanish and disappear from this old world of ours, one thing lasts eternally,—and that is war. One thing man will always have, and that is weapons. Men want. They fight for what they want. With stones, with spears, with arrows, with catapults, and barrel-shaped cannon of bronze or wood, with axes and swords, and rifles, with machine guns, and long range guns, with aëroplanes, tanks, and battleships, by wireless and by poison gas, advancing from weapon to weapon as age follows age,—ever and always, men fight. There are brief truces, and short terms of peace. These are interruptions. But if you look back through history you find that the normal state of mankind is war. When men are not fighting a war they are preparing for one or paying for one, and just now they are doing all three. And chiefly they pay me.

“You've heard of munition makers in various countries, France, England, Austria, Germany, Italy,

and old Russia. You hear their names. I am part of all of them and dominant in some. Whoever wins, I win. And because I have won so largely, I have stepped into the business which will be the munition business of the next war,—the war in the air,—the oil production business, and it is there for the first time I have clashed with your friends in America, the Gulf Company.

“I’ll beat them, for money always wins. And I am richer than they. I can stand on the shore of the sea by their side, and throw dollar for dollar with them into the waters, and when they’ve thrown away their last silver coin, my pile will not be seriously diminished.”

Sir Humphrey rose and paced the hearth, back and forth. He gestured with quick punching gestures into the empty air, as if it held his antagonists before him.

“And to what end is all this?” he asked her, as if phrasing her question. “I will drink the headiest wine of all, the plaudits of the crowds, the homage of subjects. I will be one of the kings I saw ride forth in my boyhood, when I was a ragged urchin on the streets of—no matter where. It’s no fantastic dream, but my logical goal that I am approaching. For the world is in an era of swift convulsions. Penniless journalists and pamphleteers are ruling the hordes of Russia with as iron a hand as ever their great Peter. A shoe-maker’s son is the

nominal head of the old German empire, and the widow of an American tin-plate maker has been the real power in the land where Pericles once gave orders and the Parthenon arose.

“The descendants of kings are weak, where their ancestors, who carved out their kingdoms with sword and axe were strong. *I* am such a man as founds kingdoms, not one who inherits them. I could have had a petty principality before now. But I will have an empire.”

He dropped once more upon the foot-stool before her, and his two hands were clasped upon her knees. His eyes were shining with the vision of his dream, and the glory of combat. “And you,—you, Diane,—are the accompaniment of all my longings. You walk as queen through all the scenes of grandeur, the fêtes, the reviews, the pomps, which are almost within my clasp. You are the goddess to whom the barefoot boy has dared aspire,—and not with the hope of bribing you. It is not for a temptation that I have told you of my wealth, and my greater future,—it is that you might know me better, in a hope that somehow, seeing into my heart, you might sympathize,—and after a little while learn to love me.—To one person alone in all this world I bow in respect, and admiration,—one person only has all the love that I possess,—and that is you.”

His eyes were storming hers beseechingly and his



hands clasped both of hers together. The massive head with its crown of bronze flecked with grey bent over her fingers, and he kissed them. "Do you think you will be able to love me, Diane?"

## CHAPTER VII

THE light from the fire was low, and the room was still; so still that Mrs. Mayfield could hear the beating of her heart. The red embers that glowed upon the broad grate were dimmed before her eyes, and one large, round tear escaped the imprisonment of her flickering lashes, and coursed like a straying drop of dew down the peach-bloom softness of her cheek. She released one hand from his grasp, gently, and brushed it aside. Then her tapering white fingers fluttered down like butterflies to rest upon his head, and she ran her hand through his rough mane with a slow caress which held just the trace of a plea for delay, a morsel of tenderness to satisfy his hunger while she summoned all her guards against him.

Her voice was little more than a whisper when she spoke. "Humphrey, mon cher ami!"

The Titan knew he had stirred her deeply, and with the wisdom to wait kept silence. The minutes ticked their even measure, one after another, till the sense of some alien coolness, a breath of wind, perhaps, stirring the portières at the open window, a shadow even

in the twilight of their room, caused the man to raise his head and look apprehensively from her. And watching him, she saw his eyes blaze. His face grew red. As he sprang to his feet she followed his gaze.

Towering above them, scarcely six feet away poised cat-like as if to spring from the even balance of feet set widely apart, his lips drawn down with scorn, and his eyes hard with hate, stood the American who had been entertained there but the evening before, Monte Carroll.

"You intrude," snapped Sir Humphrey.

The American's voice was level and cool and stern. "I ask nobody's pardon for intrusion here," he said. "Monsieur Lecouvreur, alias Sir Humphrey Leinster, alias whatever other name fits the uses of a scoundrel."

"Monte," Mrs. Mayfield cried.

He turned to her and a shade of his coolness vanished. "Diane," he mocked her bitterly. "Mrs. Mayfield—the noted beauty of Paris—the Mayfield—as the Ritz bar calls you—Great God!" There was an odd catch in his voice, and his eyes closed for a swift instant.

Sir Humphrey took two rapid steps toward a bell upon the fireplace mantel, but the invader was too quick for him. His feet flashed forward and his body swept through the space between them. His hand shot out and clutched the financier's throat. He shook Sir Humphrey as a big dog would shake a rat, then dropped him, limp, upon the floor.

"I've already taken some risks in getting here. But plotters of your stripe, Sir Humphrey, should not have trellises leading to their study windows. Their grounds should be patrolled by someone who isn't sleepy. Now you'll stay where you are while I talk to you." The invader swung around to face the woman. "You sit down," he ordered her, and she obeyed.

"I've come to recover stolen property," he said. "Back home I've left a boy, a child before a pair like you two, crying at the wreck of his career in the secret service,—wrecked by a nice American girl, whom he mistakenly trusted. You're not dealing with a child now. And I've come for what you stole."

Sir Humphrey was getting to his feet.

"Stay there," snapped Carroll. "You're safer there. I'll get them if they're in the room. If not, you'll walk to them with a pistol in the small of your back to keep you orderly."

He reached to his hip pocket and pulled out a small, black automatic, which he balanced lightly in the palm of one hand.

"*Apache*," sneered his fallen antagonist. "You'll mourn this night."

"Perhaps. Are you ready to give me what I want?"

The man on the floor laughed tauntingly. "And if I am not?"

His foe's tones brooked no disbelief. "Then some



of your own precious cut-throats in Anatolia have given me examples of how to handle you to get them out of you."

"Canaille," Sir Humphrey spat. "They are there." He motioned to the ashes of paper upon the grate. The American backed over to them, and resting on one knee examined them for surfaces which had been sufficiently wrapped from the air to escape the destroying fire. He found enough to satisfy him that Sir Humphrey spoke truly.

He rose, and standing on the rug before the fire looked down at Sir Humphrey, who was sitting cross-legged like a Turk, hands clasped in his lap, his composure recovered.

"Beaten in this round," Carroll admitted, "though the proofs of your rascality which were upon paper I have all in my mind. Now before I go I want to tell you something. Before long the few Americans who are working in the Near East will be like an army. They will be building railroads, and mining copper, and digging oil. The land is not yours. We have beaten you fairly and squarely for the concession. And I want to warn you. You keep your assassins off our lines, and your hired trouble-makers out of our camps. We don't like to play business that way.

"But if we are forced to it, it will be infinitely easier to catch you some dark night and to hang you higher than Haman, the law in our own hands, than to submit to your usual method of killing thousands

of innocent peasants and workmen in a war of nations to gain your ends or ours. We know the graves of two or three of our engineers were dug by your men, and their blood is on your head. We have enough on you to justify our State Department in sending marines to protect our rights. But they couldn't get at you, a million miles from a battle-front. So I personally am telling you this,—the next time we catch you killing our men, we'll kill you. Do you understand?"

"Thoroughly," spoke Sir Humphrey softly, then he jumped to his feet.

The rug beneath Carroll's feet had been snatched from under him, and he had fallen in a heap. Saki, the Japanese butler, and Critchlow, Sir Humphrey's secretary, were upon him like terriers, and although his hand reached for the pistol which had flown from his grasp, Sir Humphrey's foot was upon it. Saki had yanked the coat from his shoulders, and drawing it tight behind his back had pinioned his arms.

"*Alors*," exulted the master plotter, "we will deal with this unlicked cub."

"I saw the vines broken on the garden trellis, your lordship," said Critchlow, "and the marks of feet in the loam. The concierge was asleep upon a garden bench. He is drunk."

"Dismiss him," ordered Sir Humphrey, "but first get a strap or a cord, and tie this man securely." He turned to the Mayfield who was standing back from

the melée, her eyes riveted upon the prone figure of her girlhood sweetheart. One of her hands was clutching at her throat, the other grasping the chair from which she had arisen, and which was toppled back against the study table.

"Here is a pretty toy," laughed Sir Humphrey, handing her Carroll's pistol. "Did you ever use one?"

She took the pistol, her heart leaping, and clenched it tightly in her fist. Sir Humphrey had turned back to his prostrate enemy and kicked him, while Saki sat astride the broad back, clutching the twisted coat that rendered him helpless.

"Oh, don't," pleaded the woman, with a low moan. But Sir Humphrey did not hear her.

Raging, with the marks of Carroll's strong hands still at his throat, and smarting beneath the indignity of having been tossed contemptuously upon the floor after his shaking, he was piling epithets upon his defenceless antagonist, till Critchlow brought a strap from an adjoining room.

"Take him out and thrash him soundly, Saki," he commanded. "Strip his back and let him feel the lash. Rub salt in his wounds. *Sale Bete!*" He choked and became almost inarticulate in his wrath.

The Mayfield quietly slipped over to a farther wall, and turned the switch that flooded the room with light.

"Stop," she screamed. Her hands were behind her back.

Sir Humphrey wheeled on her savagely. "This is no place for women to interfere," he said. "I'll be obeyed."

"You were ready to give me so much a few minutes ago," she pleaded reproachfully. "Now when I ask for so little——"

"Are you loyal to him or to me?" Sir Humphrey demanded, then a crafty light shone from his eyes. "And you never answered what I asked. What is your answer?"

The girl was silent a long minute while the three captors gazed at her, waiting.

"I'm sorry," she said, softly, "but my answer would have to be 'no.' "

Sir Humphrey chuckled mirthlessly. "I thought so," he rasped. "You were in love with this animal here." He swung his foot again and kicked his prostrate foe.

Firmly the voice of the Mayfield rang through the room. "That will be all of that," she stated. "You will all three put your hands high above your heads quickly, or I'll shoot."

Sir Humphrey, Critchlow and Saki looked at her in amazement, and found themselves staring into the muzzle of the automatic pistol, which she held straight before her, traversing it slightly by the motion of her



wrist to cover the three of them. Her face was pale, and her green eyes shot angry fire.

"You would not dare," began Sir Humphrey, but she took a step forward and menaced him with her weapon. "Two seconds more and you'll learn," she cried, and one slim toe stamped the floor. Sir Humphrey's hands went up above his head.

"You too," she ordered the two employes. "Get up, Saki." They obeyed her.

"Now," she said. "Mr. Starrett and I are going away from here. Monte, you will find another revolver in the desk drawer."

"It has paid you well to be in my employ," shot Sir Humphrey, "what between gifts from me and gifts from others, I have put in your way. You will find it doesn't pay you so well to cross me."

"I'll have to chance it, Humphrey," she replied. "If you had only granted me my little request this would not have happened. I thought you really loved me."

"Pah!" He spat his futile anger.

Carroll had ransacked the drawers of the desk and come upon his weapon. He examined it and found it loaded in every chamber.

"Now we'll line 'em up and march 'em out ahead of me, Diane," he said. "You go first, and lead the way. Line up, you three, and stretch those hands for the ceiling." He barked the order like a drill sergeant.

The woman led the way through splendid salon and lofty halls, till the outer door to the drive was reached. "We'd better take them out into the garden," she said.

"Right you are," said Monte. They led their prisoners into the open air. Before the high iron gateway they halted them. Carroll pulled open his revolver, and knocked all the cartridges from the cylinder into his hand.

"I guess this belongs to you, Mister," he said to Sir Humphrey, and tossed it on the ground at his feet. "Mind what I told you, now. If you kill any of our men, we'll have to step on you like a snake."

Mrs. Mayfield withdrew the bolt in the gate, and together they strode quickly out into the street. She clutched his arm and broke into a run at the curb. The tiny red light at the back of a taxi was glowing some yards up the street, and she started for it. "Taxi!" she gasped to him, and he ran beside her.

The taxi's flag was up, and its fat chauffeur was puffing a peaceful pipe, when the Mayfield opened its door and climbed in.

"Where to?" asked Carroll, standing on the kerb.

"You're coming." It was half request and half command.

"A little way," he answered gravely.

"Bois de Boulogne," she said, and as he seated himself at her side the machine lurched into motion.

The pistol slipped from Mrs. Mayfield's limp grasp,

and she lay back against the upholstering and laughed, and laughed, until the tears came. Then she sobbed a little, and laughed again.

"Buck up, Diane. You were marvellous." Carroll's arm stretched out to pat her farther shoulder, and she nestled into it with a sigh, then rested her head against him. She felt him grow tense and aloof at her touch.

"Oh, stay a minute, please," she begged. "I'm no ogress. I won't hurt you. Haven't I just helped you when you needed me?" Her voice held reproach.

They rolled without a word past street after street, and out into the tree darkened avenues of the "bois."

"You were marvellous, Diane," he admitted, "but foolish. You have quarrelled with your—your—protector, and I guess he spoke truly. He would be a bad man for a woman to cross. I don't see why you did it."

"No," was her bitter comment. "You wouldn't. Well, in a few minutes, before you leave me, I'll help you again, and then I guess we'll part. That's what you wanted, wasn't it? It takes two to be friends, not one."

He did not answer, but his hand closed tightly upon her shoulder, till she winced, and stirred. Then he lifted his arm entirely from her, and they sat apart, bolt upright.

"Dan's dead," she said at length. "Did you know it?"

"No, when?"

"A few weeks ago. So now I can do one other thing to help you that I couldn't have till recently. We were talking last night about that card game in the Colony Club, you remember?"

"Yes."

"I told you I had never believed you guilty, in fact, I knew you were innocent. Well, to-morrow you'll find in your room a letter which you can take home some time to the governors of the Copley Club, with the proofs of your innocence. You can be reinstated, and come back to life, with all the old disgrace wiped out."

"Yes?"

"Dan framed you, Monte."

"I've always known it, but I never could prove it."

"I've always known it, but it was some time before I could prove it. Then Molly Manning told me about it. She was one of Dan's affairs. You didn't know that, did you?"

"I'd heard it."

"Molly passed him a cold deck with your extra king in it. They had it all fixed up before the game began. She would have done anything for him then. But a little later her husband divorced her. Dan didn't stick by her, so she came to me and sold me the information. I've her signature under it, and she's



working in a Boston broker's office and will back it up."

"Yes?" He was not looking at her, but far away, and by the moodiness of his expression, she could tell his thoughts were not pleasant ones.

"You're thinking that I've held this information a long time," she divined.

"Seven years, about."

"Seven years for a purpose. It could do you no good. For giving it to you would simply have been dropping you from one disgrace into another, and incidentally would have ruined me too."

"What do you mean?"

There was a long silence before she answered him, and when she did, her voice was hesitant at first, then hardened with the resolution to go on.

"There was one other thing we talked about last night. Do you remember it?"

"Yes."

"Dan knew just enough about that night of ours together so that he could have presented a fair case for divorce. He had been having me trailed for some time, only I didn't know it. And the night I lured you to Point-aux-Pines, some of his sneaky little detectives followed us. I suspect it was they who stole the car and left us marooned there for the night. Naturally they were being paid to get evidence, and if there wasn't any they'd make some."

"You never told me about that."

"I didn't know about it till the night after the game at the Colony Club.—Ugh!" (She shuddered.) "Dan was a fiend. You say you'll never forget that night. Neither will I. For when it was over, and Dan had taken me home, he stripped off his mask of being complacent at the way things were going.—He showed me just how ugly a man can be.—And we fought,—Dan had all the weapons and all the cards,—God, I was frightened!—And I had nothing but a bluff, and my faith in you, and his own guilty conscience. And I won."

"You always were a fighter," he paid her ungrudging tribute.

"I was a fighter then. But I was fighting caught in a trap, and anyone fights caught that way,—even rats. I don't ask credit. Only that is why you've never heard of the frame-up till now. You know that Dan and I never lived together,—really,—as man and wife, after the first few weeks of our marriage." (There was a ring of metal in the Mayfield's voice.) "After,—as you once told me,—I'd paid the price of my riches,—I've paid the price, Monte, several times. For Dan loved women. And although I let him run his gait, he wanted me. No man will ever know what real terror is. Of course you've been in a war, but in a war there's at least the delusion of glory,—and the comfort of public honour.—But in a war such as women sometimes fight, there's nothing clean about

it,—it has to be secret,—there's ridicule in it,—and locked doors, with trembling and fear on one side, and a drunken beast, hammering, and clawing, and pleading, and reviling, and whining on the other side. I've paid the price of whatever I gained by my marriage to Dan Mayfield.—I've paid!—Why, the open battle,—the clean-cut issue,—of the night when he told me I would either be his wife or he would divorce me, and name you, who had just then been publicly disgraced, as the co-respondent, was only one of countless fights I had with him,—but I won them, every one."

"He couldn't have won a divorce," Monte interjected. "He couldn't have gone into court with clean hands himself. You would have been just as likely,—more likely,—to have won the decree."

"He could have won enough. He could have bared all my wretchedness to the laughter of the world,—the world on the streets and in the stores, and theatres, and trolley cars. The world is unfair, Monte, and it loves to fasten evil upon women. Can you imagine what the newspapers would have done with that case, before it had dragged its course? The columns and columns of tawdry 'smut'—the pictures, the innuendoes, the sensations, the headlines,—with you a recent Harvard captain,—and then that Copley Club thing—which never did get into print, but which the 'muckers' would have loved to feast on as a high society scandal? That was what he had to threaten

me with,—and you. Nobody but our own little world knew of the injustice to you. Nobody but a few people realized that Dan and I weren't complacently half-married, like so many. He threatened me with disgrace. And Monte,—all the schooling of society goes to place a higher value on reputation than on honour,—did you ever realize that?"

"But you beat him."

"By a bluff that hit straight home,—by a wild guess that happened to be the truth,—perhaps by intuition, that mysterious sixth sense that saves women so often. I knew you couldn't have cheated. And I knew Dan was capable of anything. So I told him he might reveal me as an unfaithful wife, but I would drum him out of every club in Boston, and show him up before all his business and social associates as a man who would frame another at cards. And he turned white. He reeled as if I had hit him. Then he tried to bluff, himself, but I knew I had him, and I went farther. I must have been clairvoyant in that crisis, Monte. I told him I would show up not only him, but his associate, and that I'd ruin him and her. I knew he and Molly were running wild together, and that she was on the loose, anyway, and I just put two and two together and they made five. And the more he wanted to know what proof I had, or could have, and the more he stamped and stormed, and said I was crazy, the more I knew I was right. And I backed him clear off the boards, though it wasn't until he and



Molly split that I really did get my proof. And that was the club which I held over him to his dying day, so that he couldn't divorce me, just as he held several clubs over me, so that I couldn't divorce him. We were checkmates, until he died a few weeks ago, and now I'm free."

She stretched her arms, wide and high above her head, and her embrace took in the pure, fresh out-of-doors, and her voice was exalted. "Free," she cried. "I am my own, and no man has the slightest claim on me. What a wonderful difference death can make. I've often thought it would be my death that would set me free, but now I'm free and alive, and life—life is wonderful."

Then she cried a little, so that the man beside her was stirred and placed his hand over hers, and said, "I'm glad that such a horror has left you, Diane, and more sorry for you than I have ever been for any living thing."

She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. "I don't want your pity," she flashed. "Take me home."

She rapped on the window before them, and leaning out the door, gave the address. The car swung around.

They were silent a long while before she spoke again, until they were bowling over the cobbled streets of Passy near her home.

"When you drop me at my door," she said, "you can say good-bye to your bad woman friend. You will get my letter to-morrow, with Molly's note in it,—my last proof of friendship. There's one thing I wish you would do, and that is, see your little sister. She's come to Paris particularly to see you. Whatever your relations may be with the rest of the family, the little sister always was a hero worshipper of yours. It wouldn't be quite generous to hide from her."

"I'll see her," he promised.

"Splendid." She rested one hand lightly upon his knees and moved very close to him. "Excuse me if I don't talk any more. It's rather embarrassing to have offered a man so much or so little, and to have been uniformly refused. But I'll just take this last few minutes remembering better days."

Mingled with the ache in her heart at what seemed to be a parting, was a faint gleam of hope that would not be darkened. When all men but one fell at her feet, how could this one escape her entirely? She could not—would not believe it.

"Before I leave him, I must leave some longing with him that shall bring him back," she thought to herself, and then was swept with a feeling of hopelessness. He was so strong, and so adamant before her. But she knew that his hardness had been donned like armour to cover a bruised heart, and to prevent his being hurt again. Her mother instinct of tenderness made her long to wipe out by caresses all the bitterness

within him. Her cheek furtively rubbed against his shoulder.

The sound of his voice almost startled her, so wrapt was she in her reverie. "I don't want you to think I'm ungrateful," he said, "Diane, for all you've done for me. You probably saved me a pretty rough experience to-night. Perhaps you saved my life, and thank you for telling me of Dan's frame-up. But I'm going to leave you, as I told you last night,—despite all that you've done for me since,—because it's the only wise thing to do. Our lives have been intertwined too much and too closely for me to be just your friend. And besides the past, I don't have to tell you that you're the sort of woman to whom a man can't remain just a friend."

"No?"

Her tone was that of well-bred interest, quite detached from emotion, but quick thrills were passing through her at renewed hope of triumph.

"No,—and you know it. Least of all can I, who have not only your present loveliness to contend with, ——" his head was averted, and he gazed far off beyond any view from a taxi window,—his voice was suddenly husky and low, "but that wonderful girl, Diane Barrett."

She leaned closer. "Now that's more like my old Monte,—that pretty speech."

He whirled on her savagely. "Damn it," he snapped. "I'm not trying to flatter you. I'm just

telling you why I'm going to leave you in five minutes and never see you again."

The taxi came to a stop before the door of her apartment. "Go on," she said. "These drivers are trained, and he'll wait."

"I have all the memories of our past to fight," he went on. "And I've trampled them and fled from them for eight years,—and if it's any compliment to you, you may take it,—they're still with me, as strong, some of them, as if they were yesterdays." By the light above her door she could see that his face was drawn and pale.

"So I'll make an honest confession," he said bitterly, "and leave you that to take what pride you may in it. I know that if I stayed near you, it would be only a little while before every bit of my old love,—and longing,—and passion,—for you would return. And then there'd be hell."

"Why would there, Monte?"

He was silent a long minute, and shifted uneasily. "Oh, never mind,—you've done too much for me, for me to hurt you, even if you did once hurt me."

"Go on and tell me."

"Because I'll never marry you,—how egotistical that sounds! But I believe I could. And I'll never take you any other way. And I know I could have once. A man,—a man with any tradition, breeding, or honour,—doesn't marry for himself alone. There's only one basis for marriage, and that's children. So



however much I love—however much I might love a woman——” His words broke off.

“Please tell me,” she pleaded.

He laughed, and the laugh was as distant from merriment as the moon from the sun. “Why should I? You’re a brainy woman, Diane. Think back a little. There’s a nice boy at home where I’m going, whom you’ve robbed. However wonderful the Mayfield may be as a picture in the salon and the toast of Paris, one does not make the—the daughter, shall we say,—of M. Lecouvreur, the mother of his children, nor part of the inherited blood of a family in which he takes pride,—even though the family takes no pride in him.”

The girl recoiled. “I see,” she said, and her words were gasping as if she were caught in some powerful grip that was strangling the breath from her body. “So it’s good-bye.”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Do—do you mind kissing me before we go?”

“I don’t think that would be very sensible.”

“But you will, won’t you?”

He turned his head slowly toward her, and looked down into her eyes. And her two arms stole upward over his shoulders, like two timorous white mice exploring a warm and welcome retreat in the darkness, till they met and clasped behind him. Her face was tipped back like a flower that drinks the sun. He lowered his head, and her half-opened lips rose soft

and warm and sweet to lie against his. A little sigh escaped her, and her lips moved to shape his name in a low, almost inarticulate murmur. Then she felt his arms enfolding her, while one of hers encircling his neck was drawing them closer and closer together. With one roving hand she was recalling long forgotten caresses, rumpling his thick, dark hair, and straying down his cheek to draw his lips even more tightly against hers so that none of the joy they were instilling in her should escape. Now she was caught so tightly in his arms that she was sure her heart, that hammered against his breast as hard and fast as if rivetting them eternally into one, would be crushed in the splintering frame of a broken body, and she was fiercely, hotly glad. Till her head was whirling, and fell back, away from his lips that burned and pursued, and all her ardent, lithe, young muscles that had so strained against him dropped limp in his embrace, and she was stirred and shaken,—and suddenly afraid.

“Monte!” she pleaded, hiding her face in his shoulder. He released her brusquely, whirled from her, and opened the door of the cab. He stepped out upon the kerb and she followed swiftly.

“Thank you, Monte,”—she held out her hand. “I’m glad I’ve had a chance to know you again if only for this little while.” Her eyes held mockery that belied her emotion. “I’ll bid you good-bye, now.” Her hand was still extended.

The man before her drew himself up rigidly,—his fists were clenched at his sides, and his eyes burned. His face was pale, his voice was a whisper.

“I hate you.”

She laughed. “No, you don’t, Monte. You love me, and you’ll never forget me. Good-bye!” And she fled to her door. Ringing the bell she turned. Monte Carroll was striding fast down the street.

## CHAPTER VIII

"HE will come back," said the Mayfield to herself, but the days went by and he did not.

The day after their last passionate meeting, she mailed him a note. It enclosed Molly Manning's proof of his innocence of the charges upon which he had been disgraced at the Copely Club, with a word of her own to further his case, and a little personal letter, giving the address of his sister, Madge, and his aunt, and her wish for his good luck wherever life's road should carry him.

A day later, she received in the mail a note consisting of his card, on the back of which was scrawled, "Thanks, Diane,——Monte." Such a few words, on so little a scrap! But for days she carried it with her, and in moments of solitude drew it forth, and turned it over and over between her fingers, and read it again and again.

Once, with the sharp point of the little silver pencil she carried in her vanity case she traced faintly a



little "S" after the "Mr." of "Mr. Montgomery Carroll," and whispered the result to herself. She blushed because she had not outgrown such things, and recalled how at one stage of their childhood she had signed herself thus, as a delicious secret which only they two understood, upon surreptitious notes.

And still he did not come. She was done with Sir Humphrey, and she must pick up the unravelled threads of her life, and splice them together again, and carry on. So she began to roam the shops and buy feverishly, frocks that she did not want except for the moment, because they were very beautiful. Several times on the rue de Rivoli and rue de la Paix she turned swiftly to look behind her, with the uncomfortable sensation that she was being followed. Sir Humphrey had wanted her badly, she knew, and she wondered what he would do to her for her open defiance, and for her alliance with his foe. He was not a gentle character, in warfare, trading, diplomacy, or love, she realized.

But she was not afraid. Any minor ill that might befall her was as nothing before the haunting peril that Monte, stubborn and hard, and fighting against the spell which he knew she wished to cast over him, would never come back to her.

"He must—he must," she whispered to her mirror time and again.

There was the distraction of an automobile to buy,

for Sir Humphrey's fleet of cars was no longer at her call. It was fun to buy the finest that could be made, with a tonneau especially tailored to fit her piquant personality, upon the Hispano-Suiza chassis with its great aeroplane engine, that could roar like a lion or purr like a cat, and go at any pace from that of a turtle to that of the fastest express train, without a vibration, and carrying her in its deep upholstery as gently as the most precious of all freights should be carried; while people turned flatteringly to regard its glory. Within it she could stretch out her hand and toy with the dozen accessories of mirrors and little cupboards for holding rouge and powder, or its ash tray or cigarette lighter, and sink her slippers deep into its fur rug, and whisper through the telephone to the ear of her driver out of doors, for it was a town car that she had built.

There were, as always, the concerts and the theatres, and numerous swains, and dining at *Ciro's*, and tea-ing at *Claridge's*, and dancing at the *Peroguet* or the "400" Club. There was the growing romance to watch of that sweet boy, *Hubert Mainwaring*, with *Monte's* sister, *Madge*. That was a delight, for she was fond of them both.

But mostly, for comfort and the oblivion of her griefs, there was the sunny attic studio of *Henri Bezanne*, that mystic poet-painter, who had been a tool in her hands in the regrettable victimizing of young *Redfern*. She had discovered that his mother

and cat were "dears," and that Henri was so supremely happy in painting her beauty that he did not try to make love to her.

She had found amazing comfort there the very day after Monte left her, with his whispered "I hate you," and the wonder of his lips lying in memory upon hers, and the ache of his strong arms holding her tightly.

As she had promised Henri, she took a taxi that very next afternoon, and rode over to the left bank of the Seine and up the boulevard Montparnasse to the very peak of the Quartier Latin where in a dingy building his genius was housed.

Six flights of stairs without an elevator, she climbed, a circular, dimly lit stairway with its plastered walls scribbled over, and their paint peeling off, where grubby urchins regarded her in amazement, and where the odour of Latin cooking was pungent in the air.

She pressed the bell at the side of a heavy black oak door, and it echoed loudly within. A little old woman, grey and bent, opened the door. A tiny white lace cap perched on her decently combed sparse hair. Her face was very much wrinkled and a tight black velvet basque outlined her sagging bust. She wore a clean white apron over a shabby skirt.

"Madame," she asked.

"I came to see Monsieur Henri Bezanne," said Mrs. Mayfield.

The little old woman bade her enter. The room was dazzling with sunlight as compared to the dusk in the hall. Bezanne was off to one side from the door, standing back two paces from his easel. In one arm was his palette, and poised in an outstretched hand was a long wand-like brush. He placed them both hastily down upon the floor, and rushed forward to meet her.

He clasped both her hands in his, and leaning down, kissed them, one after the other. "Madame, the beautiful," he cried, "and good as your promise." He turned to the little wrinkled lady. "C'est la Mayfield, Maman," he told her, "*la plus belle de toutes les femmes dans Paris.*"

Still clasping one of Mrs. Mayfield's hands, he turned to his mother, and took one of hers. "You must know each other," he said. "The most beautiful and the most good." He laughed. "The only two women in my life!"

"I have brought her here from Avignon," he told his visitor, "since you were last here to sit for me. I was lonely, and Maman was lonely too, for I really believe she loves me even if she does scold me terribly."

The little lady smiled. "A child incorrigible, Madame. You must not believe all he says. Will you be seated?"

She shuffled off in her over-sized slippers to the side



of the room; there she emptied a small rocker of a pile of wooden frames, whereon were tightly stretched canvasses. Picking the chair up, she scrubbed its cane seat with a cloth, and brought it forward.

"You must not wait on me," Mrs. Mayfield chided, taking the chair from her. Then Diane noticed that on the other side of the room, mounted upon a low platform was a woman in a ragged dress, whose hair streamed down over one bare shoulder. She was holding a nursing babe to her breast, and regarding them not at all.

"You were working, Henri," she noted. "Keep on, and I'll just sit and chatter a little while, and then run along."

"Mais, non!" he protested. "I was working, and I will work some more on this model later. She is a neighbour from downstairs. Do you think I would have you here without at least a sketch,—even a sketch of one of your white hands. Always when you are near, I itch to draw or paint you."

He turned to the woman, and they spoke in liquid Italian. The model rose, re-arranged her waist about her shoulders and tossed her long hair back behind her head. She stepped down from the platform, all without disturbing the baby, whose fuzzy round head the woman's eyes never left.

"Oh let me see?" the Mayfield asked, and stepped swiftly to her side. Then the woman lifted her eyes,

and the visitor saw they were large and deep and dark, and they shone with pride till their natural beauty was enhanced many times. The model turned so that this fair aristocrat who had suddenly dropped down from the world far above her home might see what a wonderful thing had come to her. The lady might compare it with her own, if she had any, which was doubtful, for she was too slender and her beautiful face held in its inquiring smile no trace of that understanding which can pass so swiftly between mothers.

"He's a dear," said the Mayfield to the mother, and as her fair face swept down to kiss the tiny cheek, there was that trace of moisture in her eyes that led the mother to look on the lady with compassion.

Mrs. Mayfield reached out one little finger and insinuated it in the chubby, tiny hand which lay on the mother's breast. The baby fingers twined around it like tendrils about a stronger stalk, and his dark eyes opened wide, as if conscious that an angel was hovering near. He kept on eating hungrily.

Bezanne chuckled. "Funny little animals," he commented. Then in English he asked, "Is not the mother beautiful?"

"They both are," was the Mayfield's reply.

He dug deep in his trousers pocket and extracted a two-franc piece. "Till to-morrow," he said, placing the coin in the mother's hand. "The same hour in the afternoon."

The woman seemed to glide from the room, bearing her precious burden. Mrs. Mayfield stepped over to the canvas.

"You are fairly well along," she said.

"Not so far. There is nothing but flesh in the piece as yet. The soul has yet to be born. She is a good woman. Her husband works in the tunnel at Batignolles and earns little. The babe is her fifth. If France could only do as well as Italy!"

Mrs. Mayfield was seated while he wheeled the easel to one side, chattering the while. "She is beautiful, and with her babe will be a Madonna to hang on a church wall. Then she will die, and the worms will eat her, but I shall have given her immortality. Such is the accident of a life everlasting."

"You are a little mad, are you not, Henri?"

"So men say. Just now I am mad to paint your picture. The light will not last for long, and I'll just sit here and draw your right hand. The one that rests on your knee. Please hold it still, just as it is."

Mrs. Mayfield threw back her head and gazed through the slanting glass roof at the clear blue sky, whereon one great white cloud was riding. Here on the housetops of the Latin quarter the scurrying, flashing Paris which she knew seemed miles away. No sound came to them from the outer world, and all the peace of solitude was in the room. Another couch had been added to its furniture, she noted,

since she was here before. The table whereon stood a small oil burner, the half-open cupboard through which the white rims of plates appeared, and the screen on which Henri had painted a Normandy orchard in bloom, showed that the room was the sole living quarters of this little family.

From atop the cupboard where he had been curled unnoticed, King Louis, the cat, dropped with a thud to the floor. He stretched his sharp claws to scratch in the patched and faded carpet. He yawned and arched his furry back. Then he came to rub himself in a friendly greeting against the visitor's silken ankles.

The little old lady was seated now on her cot with a prosaic pair of Henri's breeches across her knees, diligently darning their seat. She lifted her eyes occasionally above steel-rimmed spectacles to beam upon the pretty lady who had brought such animation to her son's voice and eyes.

"Such a contented home, Henri!" sighed the Mayfield.

"Contentment, Madame? I have seldom known it. It is a blessing that comes only for rare instants, and the rest of our lives we spend in longing for it and seeking it. We are always dissatisfied, and perhaps that is better."

"Why?"

"That gets the world's work done, its tunnels dug,



and its houses built, and its pictures painted. Which brings me back to my old, old plea. Have you at last come to let me paint you, as I wish?"

"Why me, Henri?—Paris is filled with beautiful women."

"Beauty of face, beauty of form, beauty of heart and spirit,—Paris and the world hold millions of women, all beautiful in part, and all imperfect. There is but one, Madame, whom I have seen, beautiful in all, and you are she."

"You do not see so clearly, Henri, there are inner flaws and ugly spots in plenty."

"Clouds that pass over you and shadow you, Madame. But is an oak less stately in twilight than at noon? You have lived, have you not? So have rocks, and lightning has struck and rent them, and storms have beat upon them, but nature and time come to heal, and cloak their wounds in verdant moss, and colour them with centuries of suns and starlight that seep even through their hardness. If there is a God—He is beauty, and all His works are beautiful. Only men mar."

There was a brooding mysticism in his voice and the Mayfield was drawn with quick sympathy toward him.

"Beauty means everything to you, Henri, does it not?"

"I would live in it, Madame. It is for that I

have brought my mother here. She is a saint, Madame,—and something of her spirit shines through her eyes, till sometimes I stand in awe and watch her, and feel as the good Fathers used to tell me Moses felt when he saw the burning bush, and a voice spoke to him and said, ‘Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.’ ”

“She has a dear son. I could love you for feeling that way toward her.”

“There is your hand, Madame.”

He placed his drawing pad in her hand. “Not so true as Michael Angelo would have done, but my best,—thus far.” He rose and stretched his hands high above his head which was thrown back to face the sky. “Beauty,” he whispered. “I have seen it at times in its perfection, and who should more than I? I have seen ugliness enough, God knows.” He covered his face with both hands.

“The war,—I know,” Mrs. Mayfield murmured. “But that is all passed.”

His hands dropped limply to his sides, and he gazed into her eyes. His face had the pallor of approaching death, and his eyes were wide, distended, filled with horror.

“I have walked through a shell-hole knee deep in mud, and struggling have kicked from my shoe the crumbling and rattling skeleton of a man who once

lived, impaled and stinking upon my leg. I have seen—I have seen——”

He broke off sharply, and sat down limply in his chair. “Such things as no man tells,” he finished, and his mother was standing at his side, her hand upon his shoulder, patting it gently.

“We will serve Madame Mayfield tea,” she said. “It will be good for us all.”

“Ma chère Maman,” the artist picked her fragile, almost translucent fingers from his shoulder, and kissed them lightly. The old woman shuffled away, and returned shortly with a low three-legged stool in one hand and a steaming hot brass kettle in the other. Cups and saucers of thick white china appeared, and a slice of country “pate” and creamy cheese to spread upon thin slices of “pain d’épices.”

They feasted royally, while King Louis hopped upon Mrs. Mayfield’s lap, despite the protests of his family, and was there fed from her cupped hands, till at last he was content to curl up in a furry ball and go to sleep in rumbling happiness beneath her soft stroking. They laughed much, and talked of the apple blossoms blooming without the city on the nearby hills of Normandy; and the peace of the Barbizon fields whither Henri was going soon to paint; and the scarlet poppies along the road to Picardy; how green and well-kept were the vineyards of Bordeaux; and how the old Papal Palace shone in the light upon its hill in Henri’s childhood home of Avignon.

As the light beyond the studio windows grew grey with approaching dusk, Madame Bezanne pattered off to a nearby shop on one of the never-ending errands of a household, and her son was saying to his guest:

"And that is why I paint Madonnas, and wood nymphs, because no thing on earth is as lovely as a beautiful woman."

Mrs. Mayfield rallied him. "Come, now, Henri,—you have seen the moon rise on the Riviera."

He shrugged the suggestion aside. "But to what can one compare the beauty of a woman?" he demanded. "To not one of the wonders of the earth. I had seen slim birch trees swaying in the wind, but they were not half so lovely as the slender white forms of dancing girls. I have gazed into the depths of a moonlit lake, shadowed at its banks by a cypress grove, but it was not half so deep, nor mysterious, nor peaceful as the eyes of a mother watching the babe at her breast. To what shall one compare a woman's lips? A pigeon's feather blown down the wind falls not so softly as your kiss could fall, Madame; and all the purple grapes of Burgundy could not so quickly quench a man's thirst."

Mrs. Mayfield trilled a little laugh, a ripple of music to interrupt him. "Henri—Henri—you should go back to your verse."

The artist rose and strode to the window, hands rammed deeply in his pockets, moody and scowling.



The Mayfield stepped quickly close to his ear, and told him confidingly low: "You and your mother are to be two of my dearest friends—I'm coming to see you often. And you can wear out a dozen brushes and fourteen tubes of paint on me if you will. But I must go now."

On her way down the winding stairs she met Henri's mother, toiling upward with a bundle on one arm. They stopped together for a moment's "Au revoir."

The little old lady clasped one of the Mayfield's hands tightly in her free one, and said, "You are coming to see my Henri again, are you not?"

"Often," the younger woman assured her, "to see you both."

A perceptible tremor shook the wrinkled hand that clasped the Mayfield's.

"You are very pretty." Madame Bezanne spoke the words almost to herself, then louder, she said: "You cheer Henri greatly. He is a moody little boy, my son,—still a child, Madame—though a great genius." Her voice ranged from tenderness to boastful pride.

"He is a very great genius," the younger woman agreed. "And some of that must be you."

But the mother was gazing too piercingly into her eyes to note her compliment. "I know you will not hurt him," she vouchsafed at last. The words were only half conviction. They held a little of entreaty.

"I would like to be your very good friend, if I may," said the Mayfield, and, bending forward, she kissed one wrinkled cheek. "Au revoir, Madame," she said, and sped down the stairs.

## CHAPTER IX

So the days that slipped by fast as the sands through an old man's hour-glass were sprinkled with visits to Henri's studio. The Mayfield had consented to pose for his great picture of "Love Awakening."

For the preliminary drawings she was still partly veiled in a short Greek tunic of white. She lay languidly outstretched upon a rug-covered platform which was to be transformed on canvas into the mossy bank of an Arcadian pool. For a long time she had been reluctant. Then she was reassured by the homely presence of that elderly peasant woman, whose love and simplicity of life had moulded her into the character of a very gentle lady.

"Be a model for Henri?" the Mayfield asked herself. "Why not? I need distraction. And I am beautiful."

The impudent and hardy roving of that bad cat King Louis distracted her. He even ventured so far one day as to disturb a sleepy reverie by placing his padded paws on her shoulder and peering into

her eyes that drooped half shut and clouded with dreams.

Also these days she watched the Hon. Hubert Mainwaring being jolted quite out of his bored nonchalance by the buoyant freshness and gaiety of little Madge Carroll. The Mayfield took great pleasure in playing kindly goddess in this affair, being a much more liberal chaperone than Miss Lutetia Waverly, but recently of Boston, Massachusetts.

In the Mayfield's car they visited the old palaces of Versailles and Fontainebleau. After his first experience of being guided by Miss Carroll through the splendid galleries and formal gardens of old royalty's homes and grounds, the Hon. Hubert developed considerable of a flair for visiting outlying historic wonders. He insisted that they should always take at least a full afternoon, if not a day and evening to study them thoroughly. Given an occasional "shot" of whiskey and soda, and a periodic renewal of the flower in his lapel at the hands of his guide, he declared that he would yet develop into one of these antiquarian chaps who were always writing letters to the *Morning Post* on the glories of this and that. He wondered if there were a decent bar close to the British Museum.

Once in a while the Mayfield inquired of the girl, "Have you seen your brother yet?"

The reply was uniformly in the negative, with a troubled sigh. Then the Mayfield would give com-



forting assurance that she would see him soon,—for she herself had run into him,—and he had promised to look Madge up the first chance he got,—and she knew he would,—though he was in some sort of oil business that made him travel a great deal.

On such occasions the Hon. Hubert would call the absentee a “blighter,” and be rebuked by little sister. Madge was tremendously loyal to Monte. She had heard of the scandal in the Copley Club with absolute disbelief. She had never wavered in her faith in him, even though the rest of the family did fear that the charge was too true. They might protest that it didn’t seem possible for a Carroll. But the boy was caught red-handed, as it were, hands down,—and had made no defence beyond denial. Then he had left the country, without trying to brave it out.

To all this, little Madge would reply that her big brother had gone to play a man’s game, in the ambulance service for the allies, the goal of adventurous American youth in the early days of 1915, and once in the thick of the fighting had taken to aviation as a thoroughbred colt would take to racing.

After they were all three fast friends, these things inevitably were thrashed out. Both the older folk were a comfort to the girl, for had not Mrs. Mayfield been at “that damned card game”? And Mrs. Mayfield swore Monte was innocent. And Hubert, the old dear, having been a “blooming birdie” him-

self in the days of conflict, seated in a "sweet little bomber," was also authority in her favour. For he had seen fighting pilots of the pursuit squadrons, such as Monte's, in action, and he'd swear that since brother had downed six Jerry planes and a couple of balloons, the chap must be "all right-o." Such stunts required something of a man. But if he didn't come around and see his sister, pretty soon, Hubert would look him up. Meanwhile, the Hon. Hubert was willing to act as a little more than brother, if he only might. That was all understood.

Till at last, one day, Madge and her brother met. He had carried out his promise to the Mayfield, and he and Madge rode together a long, sunny morning, through the winding drives of the Bois, back of a sleepy, plodding old nag, and renewed their old-time affection. The Mayfield was shopping that morning, preparatory to a long motor trip in the afternoon with Madge and Hubert, and she did not know of the brother's and sister's meeting.

But she heard of it all too soon.

Instead of a taxi bringing Hubert and Madge to the rendezvous at her home that afternoon, came Hubert alone, his long legs striding angrily, and his stout stick swinging viciously, his brows clouded, and his face red with embarrassment.

"Damn it all, Diane," he stormed when he rose to meet her as she entered the salon to which her maid had ushered him. "The damnedest thing,—

beg pardon,—quite indecent language I know, but I've used up all my army language in the last half hour—have to get back to stable talk soon.—Madge isn't coming,—to-day,—not any day, as far as I'm concerned.—But we'll go along together, won't we? No reason to spoil our fun, is there?"

"You poor dear boy,—sit down and stop glaring as if you were going to eat someone. I'll get you a drink."

The Hon. Hubert collapsed into his chair. "Right-o," he said. "You're absolutely ace high with me. Top-hole. Nobody like you."

The Mayfield laughed, over the tabouret from which were emerging bottles suitably labelled for dealing with the symptoms of derangement her visitor showed.

"Now just steady yourself, Hubert," she advised. "You and Madge will be back together to-morrow as thick as thieves, and you'll regret those words. After you absorb a little of this you can tell me all about it, and I'll tell you where you were wrong, and how you can put yourself right.—For there isn't the least doubt about it, Hubert, you're wrong now, and you're about to be wrong the rest of your life."

His half-emptied glass before him, Mainwaring sighed with approaching peace, like a sailor who had come from outer storms into a placid port, and was now warming himself before the fire of a mariner's inn. "You are the most wonderful woman in the

world," he informed the Mayfield. "I vote we take a long ride somewhere this afternoon, then buy a ripping big dinner, and go to a show."

"You've quarrelled with your girl," was the Mayfield's accusation.

"Right you are, and once and for all. By the way, do you know where that rotter of a brother of hers lives?"

"Why be jealous of a brother?" jibed his companion. Then she admonished him. "Besides, he's no rotter."

"Then he's an awful ass," growled Mainwaring, and buried his nose in his liquor.

"You might as well tell me what it's all about," advised the woman. "I'm bound to find out anyway as soon as I see Madge."

"Oh, it's nothing to discuss. It's too damn silly. It doesn't amount to a thing, really. I could fix it up in five minutes if I could see this fellow. By George, I will see him, too. We'll see whether his blessed old embassy can't locate him."

"Hubert!" The word was a challenge. "You're hiding something from your old friend."

"Rot! Let's go riding."

The Mayfield arose. "I'll just telephone Madge and find out what all this is about," she told him.

He scrambled upright. "Oh, I wouldn't do that," he warned, obviously troubled. Then with



clumsy craftiness, "Besides, I doubt if she's at her hotel now."

"Hubert!" Again the ringing demand.

"Oh, all right," he assented wretchedly. "Sit down and I'll tell you. Even if it's too damned absurd. Why, you know how I stand where you're concerned. I suppose I'm not one of these brilliant beggars. But I'm not a bad sort. Wouldn't beat the wife, or anything like that. Diane, I wonder whether you wouldn't go farther and get worse, than take the future earl of Nortwicks. Aren't Americans keen on titles?"

The Mayfield dropped into her chair, and rewarded him only with open amusement. "My dear, you're impossible, but sweet. I'm going to help you get back to your Madge."

Mainwaring grunted. "Think so? Well, I'm not going back to Madge as long as she believes fool's tales, gossips, and scandal mongers."

A shadow of fear passed over the Mayfield's clear sky. "It's something about me, isn't it," she asked quietly.

"Why, the fact is,—this fool brother of hers evidently holds something against you, or believes all he hears, and she thinks he's a little tin god. Madge isn't such a cat, naturally. But he holds her spellbound. And he's had the nerve to tell her she's not to come to see you any more."

Although Diane gave no sign of the blow she had

received, she was inwardly reeling. Some dead weight, enormous, heavy as a millstone, had taken the place of her heart. The room, which had been so cheery and sunlit, was suddenly dark. So this was Monte's answer to her daily entreaties, wafted him by mental wireless, her little pleadings to return, breathed nightly into her pillow, and whispered by high noon to vagrant birds which might alight on his window-ledge. This was the end. All she had done for him had been a vain effort, as far as yielding her any return.

"Give a dog a bad name!"—She recalled the adage, sadly. She had damned herself in Monte's eyes years ago. He was hard, and unforgiving.

Even then she was building excuses for him. He had caught her at a vile misdeed when she robbed his boy friend. Perhaps she was really bad and he was right,—but she loved him. She had certainly proved that to him. But then she asked herself if she really had demonstrated it beyond any doubt. It was natural that he should consider her Sir Humphrey's mistress, she admitted, after seeing her in his home, practically in his embrace, the night when she had done the plotter's errand, especially as she had been introduced as the financier's daughter, under a false name, only the night before.

But Monte had been sinned against himself. He had been under the condemnation of false appearances. He, too, had suffered. He ought to have

learned to withhold judgment, she accused him, upon a woman who had given him such proofs of good will. Not Monte! He was stern as his forbears in their wintry Plymouth colony, as uncompromising and intolerant. Perhaps that was part of his strength.

And now he had insulted her. Her cheeks burned red with the shame of it. He had branded her unfit for his sister's companionship. He had degraded her. She felt the tears rising to her eyes, and swore that she would not cry. She placed one cool hand to her face to allay its fevered heat. But one little phrase was beating more steadily and dominantly through her brain than all the thoughts of shame, and anger, and revolt, and arguings to excuse him. And the words that beat as steadily as the ticking of the long pendulumed clock in the corner of the room were these:

“He'll not come back.”

She was aware that Hubert was rattling along about what “rot” people could get in their minds when they had nothing better to do than to consider the faults of their acquaintances, and what a corking good time they had always had together, they two,—and how he, for one, voted for a large and expensive evening,—but she only half heard him. The sound of his voice, distant and meaningless, filled her with a vague wave of affection for him, and at the same time a sense of annoyance that she was not alone, so

that she could grapple with this foeman of sorrow who was oppressing her, and cast him out.

She could not go riding with Hubert, now. She must think. But the poor dear was absolutely right, as so many well intentioned people are absolutely right though exasperating,—what she had better have was a gay evening.

She interrupted his steady flow of conversation. "Madge is a dear girl, Hubert, and one of the dearest things about her is her loyalty to her brother. She will be very loyal to her husband some day. As for Monte, he—he's an intolerant sort. But he's fine, too, in his way. He has ample reason to think that he's caught me off-side in the game, but he'll learn differently—I hope—and if he doesn't——" She broke off lamely. "If he doesn't, I'm sorry but I can't help it."

Mainwaring had one of his rare flashes of intuition. "By George, Diane, he's not the beggar you're in love with. I've known all along there must be someone."

"I used to be, years ago."

The man gazed steadily at her moody, downcast eyes. "Well, you've always got your friends," he said aloud, and then to himself, concerning another man, he muttered, "The damn fool!"

The Mayfield was on her feet, smiling brightly. "I've got you for a little while, haven't I, Hubert? Till you and Madge, or some other nice girl, patch



things up to keep up the family name? I'll go out on a real 'tear' with you to-night if you'll buy tickets to a show."

She held out her hand, and the Hon. Mr. Mainwaring arose and grasped it. "You're a plucky little devil," he said to her. "See you at seven for dinner."

## CHAPTER X

"HE'LL not come back."

The Mayfield sat at the dressing-table of her boudoir obliterating the last faint suspicion of ravages made by tears. She smiled disdainfully to the pretty lady who smiled back at her from the mirror, but whose sad wide eyes somehow distorted and softened the scorn for regrets in her curling lips.

"I can be very gay without him, comrade," whispered Diane to her image, and at the thought of just how revelrous and happy she would be, the tears once more threatened to bead her long lashes. "We are very beautiful, are we not? And men are more plentiful than taxis. There's always one coming around the corner in a minute."

She had let Lysiane go, after the maid had helped her into a woolly peignoir, and had given her comforting attention to soothe her troubles. She had wanted to be alone. And she was glad, now that she sat combing her tawny aureole of chestnut hair, with furious, punishing strokes of her comb. She was refreshed, and ready to prepare for carrying on

her life again. Her life was still far too young to be ruined by any one man, and as for Monte Carroll, she hated him.

She hated him most because his insult had erased his image from the spot upon which it had always rested in her heart, and left nothing there, she was sure, but an aching, longing emptiness. She never would think of him another minute. If he could only know that, it would hurt his vanity, anyway, she thought. All men are vain, even more vain than women.

So she brushed, and brushed, and thought, till suddenly in her mirror she caught the tiniest white reflection. And it caused her to snap alight the second of the two flower-like lamps upon the table, and lean very close to the glass. Her brush dropped with a clatter upon the rosewood surface, and she searched with painstaking fingers until she had found that which she had suspected,—a single grey hair.

She shivered. "I'm not so old. Twenty-six." And then she knew she hated Monte Carroll the more. "You put that there," she accused the absent man, who always would be absent, because she would never see him again even, if he apologized to her on his knees. "I've another score to settle with you for that."

She would not pull it out, lest two grow in its place. She would hide it away very carefully, where no one would spy it. And she would dress herself

to-night, and every night, so that Hubert, or whatever man she honoured, would be the envy of all others. Was she not the Mayfield? As great a celebrity in her way in this beautiful city as Clémenceau, or even Sir Humphrey?

She rummaged in her wardrobe and drew out at last an evening gown to suit her needs. They would probably dine at the Café de Paris. Hubert liked the place. Over its soft carpets and between its spotless tables women glided from time to time who had been drawn to it by a world-wide selective process for their charms, and they were there consciously on display, in trappings of splendour which had cost the life-long toil of many men.

She slammed the door of her wardrobe shut and stepped to her pier glass. She slipped off her peignoir. This filmy, shimmering, little work of the modiste's art which she held in her hands was nothing to be dropped over the head. She stepped into it, and drew it up about her.

A bodice of peacock blue sequins, high in the front and guiltless of any back, suspended by a tenuous string of tiny sapphires that sparkled in two lines of exotic blue fires descending from the pure white column of her neck. Slashed sharply downward to meet in the waist at her back, the sequins clung to her tightly, clear to the svelte curve of her hips, where they vanished in a billowy cloud of green chiffon. The gown was a triumph of Jenny's,



designed for the Mayfield alone, and fitted to her by Madame Jenny herself, with no intervening mannequin to display it to a blasé group of fashionable sensation seekers.

"I would label it 'Conquest,'" Madame Jenny had told her. "If you did not conquer all without need of such weapons."

"They help," the Mayfield had retorted, and Madame Jenny, chuckling, in perfect understanding had replied, "Is it not true?"

"Everyone else will love me," the Mayfield said to her pier glass, as she pirouetted slowly, and the "else" was vindictive. One man would not. She opened her jewel box upon her sadly diminished collection, "The rewards of virtue," she jeered as she regarded its several empty cubicles. But one of the earliest of her gifts from Dan Mayfield supplied her what she sought, pear-shaped sapphire pendants for her ears, hung upon a slender string of diamond chips till they almost brushed her bare shoulders. From a drawer she drew an enormous fan of blood-red ostrich plumes. Then the door-bell rang, and she listened while the cuisinière admitted Mainwaring. From her wardrobe she pulled her latest evening wrap, white silk from a blue-lynx collar, and swathed herself in it before the glass. Satisfied, she reached for her gloves, then dropped the cloak from her shoulders, and holding it over her arm went out to her visitor.

"Immense," was his tribute, and his eyes told more.

"You might mix me a cocktail," she admonished. "We shall be gay to-night."

"Right-o." He reached for the ingredients, and when she had scurried out to the kitchen and back with the ice, and they had downed it, and he had helped her wrap herself warmly in her cape, and they were seated in his limousine, she asked, "Where to?"

"Café de Paris," he said, as she had foreseen. "You always like that, and then a surprise."

"Tell me, do!"

"You remember this Galuppi,—painter chap,—that did you for the Salon last winter? He's back in town. Ran into him at the Ritz. Funny what queer chaps one strikes at a bar. Always meeting the most interesting sorts.

"Well, Galuppi asked for you, and then I told him we were dining to-night. 'That's bad,' he said. 'I'm just here for to-night. Remember that picture I painted of her?' Of course I did. Who wouldn't? Salome; and Gad! What a Salome! 'I've just found a sensation,' said Galuppi. 'An old Russian friend of mine, model for me when she was a little girl, now a great actress. She's up at the Theatre Tremina, and she's doing Salome to-night. Marvellous dance. Marvellous music by Strauss. Marvellous settings. You know these Moscow artists,

what they can do.' And the chap ran on. Well, the upshot was I told him to rally around. I knew you wanted a good party, and I'm not so brilliant an entertainer as some. So after dinner,—I pigged the dinner, wanted you to myself, you know,—he's coming around. We're going to the Tremina, and see his little girl dance, and then the four of us are going to dance together wherever we want to go."

"All right," said the Mayfield carelessly. "You're a generous soul, and I'm glad you pigged the dinner. I'm moderately fond of you, Hubert."

They swept into the Café de Paris quite as a prima donna enters upon her stage, and dinner was a success both gastronomically and theatrically. All the world was there, the little world that knows everyone, and the Mayfield was its star. But her eyes strayed, and her mind roved in discontent, even when Galuppi arrived with his ingratiating worship, bowing low to kiss her hand and murmur, "Princezza." She noted every man who entered the doorway, and none of them was Monte Carroll.

Diane and Hubert included the Italian artist in their course of benedictine and coffee, and he told them of Djina Nuova, who was rising in the firmament of Europe's fair women, a dancer incomparable, daughter of a ballerina in the imperial ballet at Petrograd, and of a straying, irresponsible musician, Victor Nuova, a fellow townsman of his from Naples.

"She will set the world afire," he promised them.

"She has all of Victor's fire, and he was almost a great composer. Her mother has given her something more, an iron will and discipline. And she is beautiful. What more would you? I think she is a little like you, Madame, relentless in pursuit of whatever she wants."

"You under-estimate me," said the Mayfield. "I have everything I want without pursuit."

"Doubtless," said the artist, "but God help the thing you finally consider worth your while to pursue. As I told you when I painted you, there is much of Salome in you, and that's why I wanted you to see Djina to-night."

A shiver passed over the Mayfield, as if someone had opened a door close by, and she pulled her cape to her shoulders. A little of Salome? How much!

She too had been scorned by a man, and hatred had taken the place of love. If only she could turn him over as easily to an executioner! She would take delight in watching the sword fall, save that it would not hurt enough this man who had insulted her, despised her, branded her as something too mean and low and soiled to have contact with him or his, after she had indeed pursued him, and offered him on his own terms all for which the rich and powerful of earth were glad to bid high.

She shuddered again with cold. She could not blot him out. Then she laughed nervously. Strange



that she should be taken to see Salome on a night like this! A premonition of evil troubled her.

"Let us go," she said.

The fates of men and women and empires hang on such little, unwitting decisions, and on the blunders of men. The Hon. Mr. Mainwaring had never seen Wilde's sensuous, sad tragedy, and Galuppi did not suspect the storms that were raging in the Mayfield's heart. And he was right about Djina Nuova's genius.

Her act was the second on a double bill, and they arrived early at ten o'clock. They saw the curtain descend on the inane ensemble of an ordinary French revue, stage cluttered with pretty women, semi-nude, in bizarre head-dresses, singing and dancing with more enthusiasm than melody, while a comedian and the headline "vedette" passed chummy quips of dubious taste with the orchestra leader and the slightly inebriated gentlemen of the front rows.

The second act, given by the Moscow troupe, already being bruited as the sensation of Paris, was to be quite different and far better. Meanwhile the audience could rush out to the American bar and circulate along the promenairs, and the Mayfield's party could gain its seat in a box, and the Mayfield could dispense with her wraps to the gasping "Ah!" of an audience that knew her by sight and reputation, and to the agitated sibilants of a thousand gossip-

ing tongues, rare incense and heady wine to man or woman.

Curtain! The house was dark, and the haunting sweetness of Strauss' immortal music flowed from wood-winds and strings.

The scene was a pillared, vine-hung terrace of a Roman palace, built beside the purple waters of the sea of Galilee. Roman soldiers, in corselets of bronze and red short tunics, were playing dice upon the stony pavement, and a hideous Ethiopian executioner was mounting guard with flashing broad scimitar above the stairs leading down to a dungeon. . . .

The daughter of Herodias entered, gliding listlessly on sandalled feet, ornamented with henna at toe and heel, with a cloak of gossamer weight, as many hued as a snake skin, gathered gleaming about her slender frame. She laughed to scorn the honest suit of a Roman officer, and her eyes were wild with pain. She strode to the door of the dungeon, and listened to the mumbled prayers of the strange, wild, goat-skin-clad prophet imprisoned in a basement cell below.

"Jokanaan, are you there?"

"What have I to do with thee, daughter of evil?"

The play was on, and the Mayfield was leaning forward from her chair, hands gripping its arms till the knuckles almost burst through their white flesh, her lips half opened, breath quickened in sympathy,

and her shining eyes rivalling the jewels at her neck and shoulders. The men with whom she had come to the theatre disappeared from her consciousness; she was sheltered in a house of darkness; and a rare actress with a flaming spirit and a form of beauty was talking upon the stage not only to her prophet in his dungeon, but to the Mayfield in her box.

“Jokanaan, your lips are red as the cherries that hang on the hills of Judæa. I would kiss your lips, Jokanaan. Your skin is white as the milk from the goats that graze in the valleys of Zion. I would rest my head upon you.”

The Nuova's body rocked and swayed, and her arms were flung wide in appeal. There was a sob strangling in the Mayfield's throat, and past the stage she saw the room in Dan's fishing shack at Point-o'-Pines, and another woman was pleading there, a little more subtly, a little less frank perhaps, but using every desperate weapon of her sex to lure and sway to her side, even as the child of Herodias was fighting there on the stage for the man upon whom she had set her will.

But the saint repelled Salome. Queer modern world, where saints still existed! But Monte was no saint. He was a red-blooded, two-fisted man, who had killed his man in battle and was even now engaged in merciless combat for the wealth that gushed out of the earth, and the luxuries and power its possession would bring. Salome bribed her

Roman guard with a kiss, and the saint was brought up from his dungeon, where she could imperil his soul with the seduction of the senses. If the guard later took his own life upon his sword, Salome would not give him a moment of pity. She would stride across the body of the fallen soldier, if need be, to come closer to the drawn white visage of The Baptist. And this was because she was wicked, a thoroughly bad woman.

Poor, pitiful bad woman! Profiting nothing for evil, and all her designs frustrated! The Mayfield's eye-lids flashed shut, and shut again, to stem a tide of tears, for the woman who was her spiritual sister. And she acknowledged that Monte was right to label her bad.

But what were good and evil that one should weigh them beside the overwhelming thirst of one's soul? Was it not the rule of the world that strong men desired, and worked, and schemed, and fought, and trampled, and wrought injustice if need be, but kept their eyes on what they wanted, and clawed their way toward it until it was theirs? Until they were "successes in life," acknowledged by the world, and privileged to lay down pious homilies to youth upon the sure rewards of diligence at one's task, and honesty, and loyalty, and all the homely, rugged virtues by which presumably they had attained high station?

Monte was right that she was bad. But her badness consisted in loving one thing alone above all



else, so that her very love had warped her soul and made it something twisted and evil. It was not part of her beauty.

Even so it was with Salome, now cringing on the dungeon stair, her saint returned to his cell at the approach of Herod, mighty ruler.

The saint was still impervious to her charms, preferring to die than be hers, so fastened were his eyes on some other vision. So fastened was his heart upon some other one single vision, which he loved above all else, that he became good, even to perfection! A strange, mad world was this where one man's love nourishing him made him good and another's devouring him made him bad; a dark, deep, trackless sea, whereon men and women guided their frail barks without compass or guide, sport of unreasoning winds that tossed one lover safely to shore and drowned another, though they had laid their courses parallel. So Salome sobbed on her stage, and the Mayfield turned hard and cold and dangerous, seated in her theatre box.

Herod sat on his throne, and looked about him in pride. He was wealth. He was power. When he spoke, men leaped to obey. He had money to buy him amusement, and when men opposed him they suffered. Only his shoulders were prey to twinges of rheumatism and he knew he was old. His stomach was fat and he loved to sit down and rest it upon his knees. All well and good, for most of his enemies

were dead and he rarely had need of action. But he regretted that all the wine he had drunk, and all the peacocks' tongues he had tasted, had left a film over his eyes and tongue, so that his enjoyments were dulled, and the world was not half so fair as it used to be. His wife, Herodias had turned from a strapping, upstanding, sporting wench into an acidulous shrew, and he suspected her of many sins against him.

He should have had her poisoned long ago, but somehow he did not dare.

The rheumy eyes of the governor fell upon the gently rocking, rounded form of Salome, perverse, erotic beauty, who always stirred in him memories of old lusts, and burnt-out passions. True daughter of her mother, she maddened him, flaunting her youth before him and taunting him in every movement and impudent smile of understanding at the bitterness of his senility. If he were only what he was! He would have tamed that vixen. He would have broken her. His mind strayed and his head nodded. Ah! He could remember, just as fair and just as perverse! And a vision of whips that rose and fell in the arms of black soldiers, and red welts on writhing white skins. His lips were dry and he licked them with his tongue. There sat the girl, ignoring him.

"Dance for me, Salome."

Slowly and reluctantly, and with stifled rebellion, the girl dragged herself back from her sorrow and the

contemplation of that bearded man in his dungeon to the magnificence of the despot's suite. She rose as in a trance, and swayed to the steps below his throne. Despair had given way to hate, and her mind was busy with wickedness.

"Dance for me, Salome."

She goaded him out of his greed to the promise of half his kingdom by her coquetries and indifference, the half revelations and swift withdrawals back of her lustrous veil. And now she knew what she wanted, what she would do with this prophet who had defied her, and she had the ruler's promise, sworn upon an unbreakable oath in the presence of his court, to give her what she willed. She walked to her rooms with her handmaidens to prepare for the dance.

"Gad! She's a marvel," said Mainwaring, *sotto voce*, behind the Mayfield's ear.

"Did I not tell you?" chuckled Galuppi. "She will inflame all Paris, la bella Djina. She was such a pretty little girl, and her *maestro* whipped her legs to keep her dancing, when she wished to rest."

But the Mayfield said nothing. She was sitting, deathly pale, watching the wing where Djina Nuova had made her exit.

There, she perceived, was another woman, there in her dressing-room, who knew and understood the wild power of passion. She wondered how the Russian had come by her knowledge. There was

no force in the words of Wilde, "lord of language" that the man had been, to move her as this actress had done, nor had the music of Strauss held half the emotion of the woman's tones in the plea to Jokanaan.

When Salome's decision of hatred was taken, and her mind was plotting murder, she had entered and possessed the mind and heart of the woman in the theatre box, the other woman scorned and insulted, and wounded in pride, yet burning still with desire. Twin sisters in beauty and passion, with hands outstretched to clasp across the intervening ages; all the refinements of her modernity were stripped from the Mayfield by the rough hands of primitive feeling; all the antiquity of Salome brought up to date as the crime story in the latest newspaper editions by the unchanging, eternal sameness of human nature.

Djina took the stage again, and hollow drums of an Orient timbre beat her measure, and a plaintive flute sang her melody. Cloaked only in lace of cobwebby texture from her full throat to her little white, pink-tipped feet, her every curve and rippling muscle were outlined in the soft coloured lights that bathed her from off-stage. The dance was daring as only the dance of a Paris stage can be. And she was beautiful, so that all men admired. The pig-like eyes of the fat Herod gleamed in rapture, and his asthmatic breathing was noisy. But her beauty thrilled no one so much as the woman in the theatre



box who loved her own fair texture, and whose heart almost stopped beating with wonder as *la bella Nuova* spun her sinuous mazes on feet that fell and twinkled as lightly as falling dew.

The cob-web cloak of Salome dropped from her shoulders. The lights turned dazzling white on a little ring about her in a darkened stage. Her steps were faster and more mad, and the network of jewels which hung upon her sparkled and flamed; red rubies at her breast, and pure white diamonds on snowy, flashing thighs. The lights went out. And as the stage was light again she lay exhausted, panting, before a sated, gluttonous Herod.

“Even to the half of my kingdom, ask. And ye shall have.”

“The head of Jokanaan, he that is called the Baptist.”

The horrible executioner descended into the dungeon and emerged with the bloody, severed head upon a silver salver. And when the mad-woman had taken it, and kissed its lifeless lips, and held it tight to the warmth of her bosom, and wept over it, and laughed at it, prayed to it to open its eyes, and mocked it for the life which had gone from it, and even the degenerate Herod had been shocked by her monstrous deed, and ordered his soldiers to plunge their spears into her grovelling body, the curtain descended with a rush.

The theatre was ablaze with light. There was

nervous laughter, and the chattering of many tongues. Well fed and plentifully-wined men were getting into their coats, and women with eyes gleaming excitedly were greeting friends, and covering with furs and silks their soft voluptuous scented flesh that emerged from their gowns like swelling flowers bursting from budding stalks. The exits were crowded with merry-makers impatient to be off to the slippery dance floors of Montmartre and to such noise of popping champagne bottles and surging violins as would drown out the disturbance within them, which was troubling them, from the spectacle they had seen.

The tragedy was done. Now for the comedy of real life.

But the Mayfield was wiping her eyes, seated in her chair, oblivious to her surroundings, pouring out sympathy from the depths of her soul to the poor, tortured woman, who somehow had lost her way from the clean and sun-lit world, had sunk into vileness, and attained peace at last only upon the points of spears, struck deep into her flesh to rend her heart.

The deed that Salome had done was not so monstrous. It was the logical and right result of her suffering. Ineffably sad, but life was sad, and the sleep of death was sweet to give her peace.

It was the rejection by Jokanaan, the pallid, insane ascetic, that was the monstrous, unnatural thing, and his reviling and his insults hurled at a woman in

love. A man possessed by an idea, an abstraction, an intangible vision in the clouds, and going to his death for it, shaking off with sneers the offer of a reality that should have been wealth to satisfy the most greedy, the tangible and physical person of Salome, bringing him all her service, caresses, and devotion! There was something revolting in that, to a woman whose pride was in the sleekness of her skin and the suppleness of her limbs, and whose vision of life saw that the world was a cup brimming over with rare, intoxicating wine to be drained slowly and sensuously, and with infinite relish before its dregs were reached and one succumbed to the inevitable sleep.

So Diane was glad that Jokanaan had been killed. And as for Carroll! That tall, stern, dark critic of her conduct, who lacked Jokanaan's excuse of saintliness, who did not flout her for a journey to heaven, but to keep on working for money, and then for some other woman! Flashes of oppressive heat and chilling cold swept alternately over her. She hated him. No other woman ever should have him. That much was certain. She would willingly see him in his grave first. Her nails cut deeply into the palms of her hands. She shivered, and her heart seemed to stop and sink and melt within her, and need to be shaken into action once more. Then it hammered against her breast like a sledge, and her lips were strangely dry. Her bosom rocked with uneven

breathing, and her mind was rushing fast across the images of Salome's triumph and death, and into the calm, cold contemplation that hangs on the border of delirium, the contemplation of murder.

She hated him. And there is no deep, real hate that does not carry its wish to kill.

A gloved hand touched her arm, and she looked up. The sympathetic, kindly face of the Hon. Hubert Mainwaring was smiling down at her quizzically. "Your friend Hubert is a damn fool, Diane, to have brought you here to-night. We didn't need tragedy but darky shouters. Let's get some. Galuppi's gone to get his friend and will join us at the '400' Club."



## CHAPTER XI

THEY supped and danced at the club, two beautiful, silent women, and two jovial, proud men. La bella Djina was swathed to her chin in an Egyptian mantle with a silver fox collar, and her dark almond eyes were weary. Her Oriental high cheek bones were flushed with a warm red glow that seemed to be backed with gold, but she frankly admired the Mayfield's creamy pallor, the jade ethereal fire in her eyes, and her tawny, chestnut mane, so that the two women were friends at once, and the party was at ease.

One of the Mayfield's rivals in Parisian fame was among the revellers, Mme. Cleone of the Comedie Française. She was wearing a rope of pearls that wound three times about her neck and hung almost to the floor as she arose to dance with a swart Maharajah from upper India, whose dusky wife was bending her diamond coronet close to the whispered flatteries of a French editor, noted for his vitriolic attacks on the British empire.

Mainwaring was rattling along with gossip, mainly about Mme. Cleone's latest flair, which was the giving of dinners for statesmen in her mansion at Neuilly-sur-Seine.

"It was Secretary Gommard," he said, "the big Normandy farmer, who elicited her *bon mot* last Monday night about the pearls. Have you not heard? All Paris is laughing about it. Gommard was sitting on her left, and he reached out his big paw and held a yard or so of jewelry up to the light. 'What beautiful pearls!' he remarked, trying to chaff her. 'It must have taken a great many oysters to make them.' La belle Cleone looked him straight in the eye, and put her chin in the air. 'Mais non, Monsieur,' she spoke as to an audience, and then she held up her forefinger. 'It took but one.'"

They laughed together. "And who, do you suppose, was the one?" asked the pretty Djina.

"Oh, some South American probably. The pampas breed millions and fools," answered Mainwaring.

"Or Sir Humphrey Leinster," put in Galuppi. "Money means nothing to the financier. And those pearls would have cost whole droves of South American cattle."

Diane roused herself from a distant reverie. "I think the amours of Sir Humphrey are greatly exaggerated," she remarked. "And at any rate, he is

no fool. A person does not gain such wealth as his by over-paying on the open market."

"I beg your pardon," said Galuppi, and his smile was ironic.

The Mayfield leaned to Mainwaring. "Dance with me, Hubert," she begged. He arose. "Dance for me, Salome," he mocked. "Only I have been wanting to for some time." They struck off in rhythm together.

"Will you leave me over by the telephone booth a minute?" she asked. "This is rather an empty life, I think to-night, even with a friend like you. I'm going home."

"Don't blame you a bit. We'll have to sleep off this Salome show, even if La Djina was wonderful."

"She is wonderful, and I'm going to know her, and we'll have tea together, often, Hubert, when her discipline allows."

She went to the telephone booth, and when she emerged it was with inner excitement. "I'll drop you at your home, Hubert," she told him. "There's no use your travelling way out to Passy with me and back."

Mainwaring looked at her sharply. "Whatever it is you are up to," he said, "don't do it. The whole Carroll family isn't worth it, and if you say, I'll cane the beggar within an inch of his life, or let him thrash me."

She laughed derisively. "Such belligerence! Why bother? And Madge wouldn't like it. Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, drop me at the Imperial Club, and confound Madge."

They made their excuses to Galuppi and Djina, who were remaining, and sped away in Mrs. Mayfield's car across the brilliant square of the Opera. Hubert was dropped at his club, and Mrs. Mayfield's motor hummed away toward Passy. Sunk deep in its cushions the woman sat with eyes half closed and glazed, saying over and over to herself, "I hate him—I hate him—I hate him." She was sure that her heart was breaking.

Half way out the Champs Élysée she lifted her speaking tube and gave Sir Humphrey Leinster's address to the driver. The huge car swerved at the approaching corner. Without relaxing its speed it made the necessary *détour* through the deserted streets to draw up before the high iron gate, behind which a garden and mansion were hidden in darkness.

"You will wait," she told the driver. A concierge came leaping to the gate at her sharp ring. He turned its massive lock, and admitted her. A light flashed and shone above the *porte-cochère* of Sir Humphrey's house, and as Diane skipped up the three stairs to the door, the portal was swung wide. There stood Saki, bowing and smiling his greeting,



just as if all recollection had been wiped away of that recent time when he and his master and Critchlow had been backed off from their prostrate foe, and forced to walk in front of the Mayfield's pistol, while she guided the fellow to safety. An imperturbable, exceptional face for poker was Saki's.

"Good evening, Saki," she spoke to him with a bright and confidential smile, as if she were taking him into the secret of a great practical joke. "Sir Humphrey expects me, I think."

"Oui, Madame. In his study, Madame." The Japanese bowed with eyes a-twinkle but with all his old, irreproachable deference. And he led the way, announcing her at the drawn portières.

Sir Humphrey stood facing her, his back to the study table. The room was in semi-darkness as when she had entered it the other night. She could see the reflection of flames in the fireplace. She strode straight forward and stretched out her hand to the financier, and if she trembled inwardly with the knowledge that she had entered a lion's den, no trace of it showed in her demeanour.

Sir Humphrey took the proffered hand in his, but he did not bow to kiss it, as was his wont. He stood gazing into her eyes, with the piercing inquiry and amused mastery of what they reflected, that she had so often seen in him when he greeted such other pretty women as the comtesse Vendôme, for instance, who sometimes entered his retreat, always

seeking something of him, and always willing to be very grateful.

Mrs. Mayfield recognized his glance as token of their altered relation, and she girded herself for combat. Fear left her. The oppressiveness of hating Monte Carroll every minute immediately dropped from her. She felt a wave of elation, as one who loves battle feels in the recognition of a worthy antagonist. How often he had sent her out on errands of subduing and seducing masculine wills. The practice that he had given her should now be turned against him.

"It's a wonderful surprise to see you again," she told him, as if welcoming him cordially to her home. "Won't you sit down?"

"We were interrupted, as I recall, in our last conversation," was his reply. Still holding to her hand he stepped aside to show her two easy chairs drawn to the fire, and between them, the sandwiches and bucket of champagne, just as if they had never been disturbed. "I've been expecting you would call again. Though I did not think it would be so soon."

She slipped her cloak from off her shoulders and gave it to him, withdrawing her hand from his clasp. Then she slipped one arm in his and guided him around the table. "How thoughtful of you," she praised, as she regarded the feast. "But where is my foot-stool?" He fetched it from beneath the

table, and as she seated herself, he drew up his high-backed chair, closer to her and the fire.

For a long time they sat silent. Sir Humphrey's position obviously was that of letting his guest make what overtures she wished, so that he remained master of the situation, to grant or to refuse, if there were requests. And if there were not to be requests, why this surprising visit, after the Mayfield had so definitely, not to say dramatically, broken relations with him?

"You have killed men in your time, Humphrey, have you not?" . . . The Mayfield broke the silence.

"I never have admitted it."

"I would like to have one killed," his guest confessed.

"Better drink a little champagne," he advised.

She reached for her glass, and he poured. He seemed about to leave his glass empty, but at a motion from the woman he poured a little into it, and they drank together. The Mayfield lifted her glass to the level of her eyes, and silently toasted him, a gesture he acknowledged only by a wry grin.

"I want to have a man killed," she continued. "We might as well be perfectly frank with each other, and forget dissimulation."

"If you start being frank, I shall distrust you immediately," he cautioned.

"Oh, women sometimes are." She carelessly

acknowledged his insight. "And since I seek nothing but what coincides with your own interests, I don't have to be otherwise. The man I want killed is the one I stopped you from having tortured the other evening; the man who shook you and dropped you on the floor."

"He has strong hands," remarked Sir Humphrey in recollection. "I should have realized you loved him."

"You never spoke more truly. I have loved him since I was a little girl. But now I hate him."

"So that is it. You hate him, now."

The woman shuddered. "I could strangle him with my own hands. Ugh!" Her fingers clutched the empty air, and closed viciously. Then she swung her chair a little to face him, and pulling one foot up beneath her to sit upon, dangled the other. She retreated far into the shadow of the chair's upholstered depths, her cheek against its tall back. One of her arms was thrown out to rest upon the table, where it would fall beneath his gaze, and where the firelight would play upon its whiteness and reveal its perfection. She seemed very little, and very feminine, and having shown the claws of the cat, she now sheathed them, and displayed the pretty soft fur and daintiness of the kitten.

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," Sir Humphrey quoted, a cool and well placed barb, while his eyes were appreciating her.



"*C'est vrai*," the Mayfield admitted. "I'm glad you remember it. You have been such a good friend to me. And more! The other evening you did me a great honour. And I have been such a little fool. But were you ever in love?"

"Until the other evening," parried the financier.

"Did hate replace your love?"

"It did not. Hate never helps me to ruin my enemies."

"It might help you to kill them."

"I never would kill a person I hated. Because then he would be beyond reach of harm. If you hate a man terribly, his life should be precious to you. Once he's dead, you can't hurt him."

"Well, I hate one, and I would love to kill him."

"Meaning Monsieur Carroll, alias Starrett. Well, so would I. I am perfectly willing to kill him. But not because I hate him. Simply because he's a dangerous stumbling block in a scheme I have."

Mrs. Mayfield started upright. "Oh!" she cried. "So I needn't have come to you at all." Then she settled back in her chair. "Only I'm glad I did. I want to tell you how sorry I am that I interfered with you the other night. As for the request you made then,—I really could not consent, though I would just as soon—far rather—marry you than any one I know."

"Thanks." His response was ironic.

"Isn't that something to be pleased about?" she asked, defensively. Then she rose and stepped over the thick fur rug before the grate. She laid one arm along the mantel, and turned to face him. Her lithe loveliness was silhouetted against the glow from the flickering fire. She was triumphantly aware that he was admiring what a picture she made. "That's more than I've ever told any man but Dan Mayfield, who is dead, and one other, who is apt to die soon. You see I am very frank with you."

"You are sure you hate him bitterly enough to kill him?" Sir Humphrey asked.

"Ugh! Don't talk of him any more. The very thought of him makes me see red, and turn ill. And as long as you are sure that he is a stumbling block in your path I don't need to worry any more. So perhaps I'd better go home and go to bed. Though it's very cozy and comfy here before your fire."

The muscles of Sir Humphrey's throat tightened. His eyes narrowed to steel-like points to pierce her. "Won't you sit down," he asked. "I have several things to say to you."

It was a thinly veiled command, and the woman recognized it as such. "It's very late," she half demurred, glancing toward the clock, "but a few minutes more won't hurt us, since we've already defied numerous conventions." Then she obeyed him, alertly on guard.

"I have known for some time that this man Carroll was an opponent of mine," said Sir Humphrey, "but only in business. And very few men on earth are serious antagonists for me there. I have always the weapon of money, either to buy them or ruin them. I would have liked to buy this Carroll. He has the rare virtue of loyalty, beyond most men. But the other night when you went to his rescue so gallantly, on one of the three occasions in my life when my temper had beaten me, I saw that he was a more serious opponent than a commercial one. He was an opponent in an affair of the heart,—and in one which is dearer to me than any commercial success. You know what that heart's venture is. I told you of it just before the intruder entered. Do not think for an instant that I have given it up. I want you.—And I will have you.—What I want I always take."

The Mayfield felt a moment's fear, and because she was frightened, she laughed at him, even as his clenched fist was descending upon the arm of his chair to emphasize the "always take."

"I know you do normally, Humphrey, but sometimes you find the thing you've set your heart on isn't worth the taking. It's a question of values. What'll you spend for this thing or that? You never pay much for something worth little. If you did you wouldn't be where you are."

"You are laughing," he shot back at her, "be-

cause you are a little afraid. But you need not be. You are too brainy a woman, and I want more of you than I could ever buy. I want your devotion. And I will win it. I have everything you need, or could want, to offer in return for it.—Meanwhile,——”

He broke off and strode to the telephone. Lifting it from its receiver he spoke to an invisible voice, “Get me Monsieur Lepage at the prefecture of police,” he said. Then turning back to the Mayfield he told her he had something interesting to show her.

“It is Monsieur ‘D’ of the friends of ‘le President du Conseil’ who is talking,” he continued over the telephone when a croaking upon the wire told him his connection had been made. “I wish your latest reports upon ‘dossier DM and dossier DW,’ if you please.”

As he waited for the information he talked to the Mayfield once more. “An admirable system this of the Paris police. No one in the world but the President of the Council himself, the prefect of police, and M. Lepage, his night assistant, know the existence of the list of friends of the premier in police records. And whom the file includes is known only to the premier and one or two of his friends. We communicate with the police by our lettered identities, directing them to the proper ‘dossiers’ and get what information their detectives have gained, almost up to the minute. The detectives know only what they



are instructed to learn, without any knowledge of where their information goes. In that way many complications are avoided."

The croaking voice had resumed upon the wire, and the financier listened, a slight frown upon his brow. When the voice stopped he acknowledged his thanks and hung up the receiver.

"Your friend, Monsieur Carroll, left for Marseilles on the eleven o'clock train to-night, accompanied by his boy companion, M. Redfern," he remarked. "An agent of the police goes in the same car. And by the way, did you have a pleasant time this evening at the Theatre Tremina with your friends, M. Mainwaring, the Englishman, and the artist, Galuppi?"

The Mayfield was not as surprised by the revelation of the Titan's close touch with the police as she might have been had she not seen a little of his intrigues from the angle of a participant. But she dropped him the word of admiration which he so patently desired. "You certainly have a most admirable system of espionage."

"In France, yes. No other country can equal the French for able detectives, though Scotland Yard does well enough. The Germans make stupid blunders because they have little imagination or sympathy with the pursued. The Scotland Yarder has only an intellectual contact with him. But your French

policeman understands the psychology of his quarry, and so runs him down most surely."

The Mayfield commented, "You have been known to use Americans."

"An American woman, yes. I am sorry in a way to lose you, Madame, from my personnel in that service, but you will be infinitely more valuable to me in another relation—and I more value to you. Don't forget that.

"As for Monsieur Carroll, don't worry about him any more. Misfortune is bound to overtake him shortly, though he has the devil's own luck. Fernand is supposed to be the stealthiest assassin of all the Apache district, but the other night as he intercepted M. Carroll on the pont de Grenelle, where your friend was taking a most indiscreet midnight stroll, Carroll turned upon him like a flash. He caught his knife and tossed it over the railing of the bridge into the Seine, and then tossed Fernand after it. Luckily the rat could swim."

"You sent this Fernand?"

"I never send anyone. Only some of my subordinates know the men who displease me most, and they are not meticulous in their methods of getting rid of my annoyances. Mr. Carroll happens to have annoyed me greatly."

"He insulted me," the woman said. "I wonder that you make me such a confidential offer if my

character is as bad as I am told. I am a thoroughly bad woman, Humphrey. I would undoubtedly sell you out for a passing fancy in the way of an *affaire de cœur*."

"You are too clever. You know my power too well. Only one man has menaced me, your early sweetheart, and he is as good as dead now. I will tell you more. The clock has almost struck my hour for open ascendancy. Central Europe and the Near East are in turmoil. Russia is in the hands of men who welcome every world disturbance. Your country is far away, and too wise to become mixed up in European broils, with the *aéroplanes* of Japan liable soon to cloud its Pacific skies.

"Within the month I will tip over the puny regent of a country habituated for centuries to the rule of kings. His people are impoverished. His army has neither shoes nor clothes. His railroads are run down, and his currency is worthless. His country has no credit.

"To-day is the day of the business man. The Parliament will offer the management of the country's affairs and resources to a business man, under parliamentary guidance, forsooth,—as if any 'two-sous' political committee could check a man of affairs who knows what he wants. I will come out from behind my mask. I will permit myself to be named manager of this run-down land. And my

very name will help put the country on its feet. All Europe knows the source of the money when loans are needed for most of its armies and much of its government. From my oil fields, and mines, and forests, and ships, my plains of wheat and my munition factories. Even the League of Nations will cheer at another country on its way to stability.

“And when the country is stable, with its army’s stomach filled, good leather on its feet, and up-to-the-minute weapons in its hands, and its railroads are running, and its people are working for a wage that will support life in the forests and fields and mines which are running to waste, the ‘reds’ will revolt. I will set them in revolt, as I have done before. Then the most popular and able man in the country will be made dictator. The people are not used to governing themselves. They are used to kings. And from the dictatorship to a crown, with the huzzahs of a subservient parliament is a child’s step.

“And you, Diane, will be with me in the fêtes and the flowers, and you will receive the affection of a people made happy and prosperous by their king.

Mrs. Mayfield raised both arms above her head and stretched and yawned. “It sounds worth considering, Humphrey,” she said. “I certainly wish you luck. But I am a bad woman. I am most interested now in having one man hurt. If I can help you, let me know, only don’t forget what I want.”

She rose and donned her cloak. Sir Humphrey



rang the chauffeur's bell. He took both her hands and clasped them tightly in his. "Good night, my queen," he said, and raising her hands to his lips he kissed them.

## CHAPTER XII

SHE had been branded "bad" by the man whom she loved. Why take the name without gaining some rewards of the game? Granted that she was bad, thought the Mayfield, admitting that she was a thoroughly wicked woman, it was no disgrace in the international group of ultra-rich pleasure seekers who made Paris the gayest spot on earth. It was no disgrace in a city where from ancient times the mistresses of the rich and rulers of earth had been endowed with the awed fascination of the people; where pretty midinettes and shop girls lifted to the rank of uncrowned queens had been the inspiration for building the palaces and sylvan retreats where now the world gathered to wonder and admire at ancient splendours.

Take any fashionable gathering at smart hotel or theatre or concert, she reflected, and try to pick out which women were the wives of respectable business men of America; who were the peeresses of the British aristocracy; who were the leaders of the stage from all continents; who were the daughters of that prolific aristocracy of coal, iron, steel, wheat, corn, cattle, and

oil owners; and who were the *demi-mondaines*, who were the women present only because they were possessed of beauty and wit and charm, and because they lacked the scruple, or the handicap of superstition, that would have prevented their selling their values to anyone who would bid high enough, provided he suit their taste. It would be rather a hard task to distinguish between them, except that usually the clothing and jewels and cars and all material goods of the *demi-mondaines* were a little smarter, a little more gorgeous and ornate than those of the women which the old world pleased to call society.

Man in the old world, having the upper hand of his women, frequently lavished more upon his mistress than upon his wife, if he belonged to that privileged group which flaunted its mistresses more or less openly. In the new world, people had not yet reached that stage of civilization where the satisfaction of the senses had won a final victory over those sterner moralities which enable nations to become great. There were some signs in America that the conflict was now in process, that the germs of disintegration were eating day by day more deeply into the morale of a strong people. But the country was still too close to the stage where everyone toiled healthily as a producer, for its rich to have quite succumbed to the enervating forces of over-luxury and idleness.

Therefore women still held the whip hand over their men, who placed them on pedestals of respect. When

the men rose to power and wealth, it was usually the wives and daughters who profited thereby, and no illicit "daughters of joy." Diane often had witnessed the misunderstanding upon the continent whereby the playful young wives of solidly middle-aged American business men, dressed and massaged and "well-kept" to the point of over-smartness, had been mistaken by European gentlemen for *demi-mondaines*; by European gentlemen of the best intentions in the world, who would no sooner have insulted a strange lady than they would have worn a dinner jacket down the streets in the morning, but who had no diffidence about broaching the subject of amorous affairs to daughters of the ancient trade no matter how formidably clad, if their purses could afford such expense.

At first these things had shocked and angered her, but as she had lived year after year in a society where they attracted no comment other than that of amusement, she had gradually accepted them as the natural state of a world where human frailty was recognized to be the rule.

She had come to realize that the abstract idea, or the purposeful ideal, of virtue in man or woman was something for romanticists to write fanciful and sentimental stories about, and for comedians to evoke as material for laughter.

In spite of this environment she had steadfastly maintained her own integrity in the affairs of sex, and taken pride in doing so, as a woman of high tradi-



tions. As such a woman, she really lived the life which in her circle was regarded either as a polite fiction for wives, or a faithfulness due to caution not to lose the possession of earthly advantages granted by a well-to-do husband.

She had been misjudged and misunderstood, she knew, in this polyglot circle of mad sensuality, even by those who recognized that she was unapproachable. How she had raged against the entire male species, as hideous satyrs, when she learned how grossly they misunderstood her. Then she had withdrawn into a small circle of intimate friends, like Hubert Mainwaring, good, old, honest, Anglo-Saxon Hubert; and Sir Humphrey, who for a long time treated her only as an able employee in whose company he took pleasure; and Coudikis, the banker, too wrapt in business for experiments at psycho-analysis, who gave her profitable tips upon the movements of the Bourse and was content to lumber about her with something like the air of a big St. Bernard dog amused by the pretty antics of a kitten; and Bezanne, her favourite artist, and some of the other wielders of the brush, because they were not quite like other men, but held in their make-ups a queer streak, perhaps insane, perhaps over-sensitized, surely a little feminine, and not to be damned with the rest of bearded humanity.

The Mayfield was considerably hardened, she realized when she awoke in her home the next morning after her visit to Sir Humphrey's, to the evils of

this world she lived in. The gentle and tender heart of that erstwhile Diane Barrett, that little sentimental girl in Boston, Massachusetts, whom she used to be, had donned both coat and mail and armour plate in a worldly woman's knowledge.

Since she was irretrievably labelled as one of the bad, it should not be difficult to enjoy the fruits of wickedness, and all the spice of reckless life. She awakened with a dreamy yawn of contentment, stretching her warm arms out from beneath their covering to greet the freshness of the sunlit air, when Lysiane threw back the shutters. But as the maid shuffled out to bring her chocolate and rolls and mail she realized that the cloud which had been across the sun yesterday was still there; that she hated Monte Carroll so fiercely that her heart would break; that she was a vile person; and that she was going to have him killed. She was glad of that last.

"I will be as wicked as Messalina," she said to herself, with her chin firm, and teeth tightly shut, and her eyes winking back the tears. "This old town has seen its Madame du Barrys and Pompadours. I'll show it wickedness with a little Yankee efficiency."

Then she fell to considering. She would not be Sir Humphrey's wife. She would flout him after he had killed Monte. Being a queen was too deadly dull. She had seen several. First of all she would acquire a mansion on the avenue du Bois de Boulogne where she would have a smart and witty salon that would

make any gathering at Mme. Cleone's villa at Neuilly look like the hum-drum social hour of a bourgeois family from the provinces.

She would stage such revels there, with the help of costumers, decorators, caterers, artists, and performers, as would shock this stupidly wicked city right out of its blasé satiety. And men of wealth should pay, and her *amours* must be the amazement of the Continent. "I'll forget that stupid oaf," she determined. "I'll show them all."

And as she revelled in her rage, Lysiane entered with her breakfast, and placing it on her lap, saw that her mistress's eyes were very sad.

"*Mais, Madame, qu'est-ce qu'il y a?*" she asked.

"Nothing is the matter with me, silly," said the Mayfield. "I have been foolish enough to let things make me unhappy, but now I am going to be very gay."

"You should find it easy," said the maid. "Is not everyone gay in Paris in the spring?"

"Gay as the devil in hell," answered her mistress with a crooked smile, and fell to eating her rolls. The maid regarded her in wonder, sighed, shook her head with a troubled spirit, and crossed herself as she withdrew.

"This town has seen some famous women of light loves," said Diane to herself. "Historians will write me down as the greatest. Perhaps I should write a

diary,—not a stupid line-a-day book, but a real journal of my acquaintances and my lovers. I believe I'll do that."

And she wondered how eight or ten volumes in attractive red leather bindings with gilt lettering, would look on a shelf with her name upon them, years after she was gone. "The Memoirs of Madame Mayfield,"—ah! She could see them there in her bookcase. And on the frontispiece of the first volume she would be reclining on a divan gracefully clad in white, holding a book in her hand, as a token that she was not only a very beautiful woman, the reigning beauty of her age, but an authoress as well.

Her picture by Galuppi and Bezanne would be in them, and the new one Bezanne was making. That would help. It would unquestionably give even blasé Paris a fillip to its jaded palate when she invited art connoisseurs to see that picture in her mansion on the avenue, and since Bezanne was a noted master of the nude, and she was to be even more famous a personage, it would undoubtedly hang in the Louvre.

"I'll make this town sit up and gasp."

She sprang out of bed at last.

"And the first thing to do is to go down and see Papa Coudikis who shall buy me my mansion. He's a nice fat thing and he's rich."

So she went to his marble-front bank, just round the corner from the majestic pillars of the Bourse. She swept past the *quickets* where many people were



engaged in handing money into his keeping, and smilingly past the uniformed guardian of his sanctum. She walked brazenly into his presence, where from a mahogany desk he arose to greet her.

"Good morning, Papa," she said. "What is the price of a grain of wheat to-day? Is it lower or higher than it will be to-morrow?"

"Why wheat, my child?" he asked. "I am busy to-day with steel rails, which are shaking like a man with a fever."

"Oh, rails will do just as well. But I feel very poor, and that means investing my *sous* to jump quickly into the *franc* column. You know all about such things."

And she had timed her visit so nicely that the clock on the mantel struck twelve as she had expected it to. The banker looked at the clock in surprise.

"So late?" he said in disgust, "and I had just begun to work. I think we might invest in some lunch. The returns are quicker even than rails, and we can't lose if we go to Montagué."

"No, no," she demurred. "If we are to go to lunch I want you to motor me out to the Château de Madrid, because I have something to show you."

Her request was tantamount to an order. They walked to the banker's limousine and were whirled away.

Sliding swiftly along the avenue Bois de Boulogne she pointed to the palatial homes, surrounded by their

gardens, and high fences, and great scrolled iron gates, with the little cabins of the gate keepers, each window decked with flower boxes. Opposite them she placed one hand affectionately upon the banker's fat knee and gazed into his eye. Motioning to them broadly, she asked. "Papa Coudikis, do you see those houses?"

"I would rather look at you, my dear."

"I'd rather you would. But look at them a minute. I want one of them."

"Such big houses for such a little woman. And your apartment fits you like the satin box that holds a jewelled ring."

"I know. But I am a little lonely in my little home. I am looking for a great mansion, where I can entertain large parties. And because I am not so rich I am looking for a very wealthy man who will be glad to buy it for me. You are rich, I know, though perhaps not rich enough for that. But you know who the rich ones really are. You bankers always do. While I only see how rich they appear."

"I could buy several of those houses, child, without hurting me. You want some rich young man to marry you? Why not André de Fouquine? He has more than any other young man in France."

"Such a stupid Papa! I was married once, and I did not like it. It is so hard to lose a husband once one has him. And I think a man about fifty would be much more comfortable than one so young, he would

be unfaithful to me. Perhaps Monsieur Xydiarde would do.” (She named a rival banker whom M. Coudikis hated violently.) “He has a handsome profile.”

“He is a swine.”

“He is very wealthy, is he not?”

“I could buy and sell him.”

“Why I had no idea! It takes great cleverness to be a financier, does it not? Well, you must run over the list of your better clients, and tell me about them. And if you recommend me,—or introduce me,—you can be sure I will not rub their rough beards so,——”

She rasped his wiry whiskers upward brusquely, with her one free hand. Her eyes were smiling very close to his. “Because that strikes sparks, and would make them growl unhappily. I would stroke their fur gently downward. So!—That would make them purr with contentment.”

The banker laughed, but it was a nervous laugh. His trembling hand that lifted hers from his beard showed that he was troubled, at least by the sad suspicion he was about to spend a great deal of money foolishly. His eyes met hers.

“You are a little siren,” he accused. “You would even lure old Papa Coudikis toward the rocks. Have you no conscience?”

The Mayfield drew back coldly, and sat apart, very

distantly. "I was asking your advice, merely," she stated, with distinct hauteur. "I thought you were my friend."

There was silence for several long moments, till the banker leaned toward her. "A house is only a house," he informed her. "That is a very modest request? And you did right to come to me."

His companion interrupted him with a peal of laughter. "Oh. I've forgotten all about the house," she said, "I was thinking of lunch. We're almost there."

And at luncheon she rattled inconsequentially about a hundred trifles, and chaffed his every effort to wax sentimental, till he sulked, exasperated. She did not care. Her mind was in a turmoil. She raged at herself for stirring within him the ugliness that had brought into his eyes the gleam which recalled Dan Mayfield. She raged at all men, and the sorry scheme of life that did not contain a wickedness more lightly entertaining and less tawdry.

Of one thing she was certain. They might label her bad,—and "they" meant the one man who counted, Monte Carroll, but she could not enter into any *liaison* on a sheerly mercenary basis. She was glad when she dropped the banker at his bank, and he had bade his chauffeur to take her where she desired.

"The old fat fool," she denounced him to herself. But sadness had taken the place of rage against him,



because he had been a very pleasant friend, and she knew that through her fault and hers alone she had brought on a situation which would always cast a shadow over her friendship for him.

"I am the fool," she accused herself. "The lot of an old man's darling ought to have been so thoroughly exposed to me with Dan that I should never have dreamed of it." She sank back in the tonneau and wondered what she would do, while the chauffeur sat immobile and patiently before her. The passing throngs upon the avenue all filled their eyes with her pensive loveliness.

"Such a stupid formula for wickedness,—wine, women and song. I hate people who get tipsy and ridiculous, and both men and women are either obnoxious or bores——

"Drive me to Claridge's, fast," she ordered the chauffeur. The great car glided into motion.

Once on the road to the hotel she caught a glimpse of a tall, broad-shouldered figure, striding upon the sidewalk at the pace which only Americans in Paris can take, a man carrying no cane, arms swinging and erect, amidst the leisurely idle promenaders. Her heart leaped and cried, "Monte." But leaning forward from her seat she saw it was not he, and ridiculed herself bitterly, for she knew he had gone to Marseilles.—And she was going to forget him,—He would pay the price soon for having insulted her.

At Claridge's sunken garden, alone at her table, she ordered a highball, an ancient American liquor, which Europe had caught like a torch from the newer continent's failing hands. She drank it in furious gulps, glaring at empty space. She was in reckless mood to-day, and she thirsted for excitement. Failing excitement, there was another highball.

Hubert Mainwaring came strolling in as was his custom.

"Hello, old dear," he said, carelessly dropping into the vacant seat across from her. "You look as if you had swallowed something nasty."

"I'm just getting used to my rôle as a bad woman," she said harshly. "Be careful of your associates."

"You talk such damn rot," he growled. "Let's have another drink, and dance some of the gloom out of our systems. Wasn't la Djina a marvel?"

"When are you going to make peace with your Madge?"

"Not till she regains her senses."

The Mayfield smiled sadly. "You're a dear, Hubert, to be so loyal to me. I'm almost inclined to-day to marry you. You're so unspoiled and sweet. But it would be about the most wicked thing I could do."

"Come out of it. You need to be shaken."

"Shake well before taking?" she jibed.

"*Garçon!*" he called. "I know I'll never take you,

so why tease me. You're one step above me." He made a sweeping gesture to the servant. "Two more."

She watched him as he sat there, big and broad and comfortably solid, devoid of irritable brilliance, rich enough for anyone, clean of limb, and a man who had fought for his empire. Faithful to his traditions he was waiting carelessly for the time when he should do the customary respectable thing with the title which he would inherit. He would manage his estate as thriftily as possible. He would look paternally after the well-being of his tenants on broad farms and a couple of factory towns (where they did not conflict with his interests). He would marry and breed a family to include a son, so that the family line might be carried on after he was sleeping in the crypt of an old Norman church, beside his grandsires. He would travel far and near, play a little golf and polo fairly well, and hold much liquor like a gentleman.

"You're pretty fine, Hubert," she mused. "But somehow you don't strike the proper spark. I'd like to have a very violent affair with you, but I like you too much. It would be mean. And I'm sure I couldn't marry you."

Aloud she said, smiling into his eyes, "Here's looking at you."

And he replied, "Cheerio!"

Perhaps she might indeed marry Sir Humphrey.

But she did not want to. And that left the artist, Henri,—dear Henri, engrossed in his canvasses and his search of the beautiful, in his little attic studio, with his impudent cat and his funny, sweet old mother. She would go and play with him, perhaps flirt with him a little, but that would settle nothing. For she knew she could not marry him either. He was probably the most impossible person for a husband of any of her friends. But she could at least have a fairly satisfactory, temporary romance with him. And then she thought of his mother's plea to her on the studio stairs:

“You will not hurt my son!”

The poor old thing would be jealous of her, Diane knew. Henri was bound to be hurt when she left him. Then she exasperatedly denied that she would hurt either of them. “I’ll inspire him,” she told herself. “He’ll do even more wonderful work with me for a model. And artists are made, not ruined by love. What more does a woman want than romance and security in riches? Henri can give me my romance, and Sir Humphrey my wealth. I’ll find plenty to fill my life even with Monte Carroll out of it. And he’ll be out of every other woman’s life, too,—and out of his own.”

And she relapsed into a dark storm-cloud mood, in which she hated Monte, herself, her associates, and most of all the empty, unsatisfying life of getting up and lying down, dressing and undressing, going



always to the same old restaurants, theatres, and dances, with the same old crowd, eating and drinking, day after day, the same things in the same way, hearing the same stale gossip and the same inane chatter, buying dresses and watching those on other women.—Everything, everything was wrong and she most wrong of all.

The image that flashed most often across this thunder-blackness, like lightning suddenly illuminating a sombre earth, was that of the white-limbed Djina Nuova in her agony of pleading.

“Jokanaan, your lips are red as the cherries that hang in the gardens of Tyre. I would kiss your lips, Jokanaan. Your hair is black as the shadows beneath the pines of Lebanon. I would bury my face in your hair, Jokanaan.”

The music of grief, from a dozen muted violins was pouring madness through her ears, and Djina with her ghostly pallor flecked with diamond fires was dancing insanelly before her eyes.

“The head of John the Baptist? You did well to demand it, Salome!”

Diane’s reverie was broken by Hubert. “Jolly little conversationalist, aren’t you?” he twitted her. “Let’s dance a bit. They are starting in the other room.”

“Dance for me, Salome.” They were dancing in the other room, but the word in her ears turned her surely back into her angry memories. “All right,”

she agreed. "Just one dance, and then I've some telephoning to do."

She danced the dance through furiously, as if she herself were the mad daughter of Herodias, consumed by flames of thwarted desire and rage at the insulting ascetic.

"What have I to do with you, daughter of evil."

"Not only does he refuse to see me, he refuses to let his sister have anything to do with me, because I am bad, because I am so soiled that if she brushes by me she will become contaminated!"

When the dance was ended Mrs. Mayfield fled to the telephone booth and called Sir Humphrey.

"Your friend," said the arch-plotter coolly, and guardedly, "has unfortunately gone into a bad country, where there are some people called Touaregs who specialize in cutting throats. Have you read to-day's papers?"

"No,—tell me."

"The Fascisti have seized the reins of power in Slovenia. A revolutionary committee has announced that with the organization of the new parliament an economic expert will be called in to run the country by efficient business management backed by the militia."

"And that means?"

"That means everything is advancing satisfactorily."

“Wonderful!” the Mayfield called to him. But when her receiver was replaced upon the hook it was with a vicious slam, and her eyes were nearly blinded by tears. “Give me the head of the Baptist,” she laughed hysterically.

## CHAPTER XIII

"GIVE me the head of the Baptist."

Diane leaned against the door of the telephone booth and her head reeled dizzily. Her heart was a heavy, hard, cold lump in her breast, and she knew her world was in ruins. "I'm wicked, bad," she said to herself, "just as Monte said. But I don't care. I have humbled myself for him too much. And life has not played squarely with me. I'll have another little drink, and another little dance, and then——"

The utter emptiness of the future stunned her. "And then?" Still another little drink, and another dance, another game of bridge perhaps, and another flirtation, and then perhaps she would buy another gown.

"God knows I've gowns in plenty. What I want is to be loved. I'm tired of living in a house with a *cuisinière*, a maid, and a dog. I'd like to live in a house with a man, and love him, and manage him, and wash the face of a little boy baby, and pick him



up and kiss his bumps when he tumbles on the floor, and dress a little girl baby in silks and laces and send her out with her nurse to parade on the Champs Élysée. But I won't. That's why I hate Monte Carroll. He could have given me that, and I could have given him—more happiness than he ever dreamed of. But he wouldn't. I wasn't good enough for him, nor for his blessed family to have anything to do with. 'A man doesn't marry for himself alone,' he says, 'but he marries someone fit to mother his children. And you've robbed a boy, and are the—shall we say daughter of M. Lecouvreur?'—Well when he's dead and gone there will still be plenty of men to love and marry me,—but nobody I want."

She set her mouth in a hard straight line, to keep her lips from drooping at the corners. She closed her eyelids tightly, then opened them on the same hateful too-familiar hotel lobby. "I must get out of this place."

She rushed to the street and hailed a taxi-cab. "Drive me—drive me anywhere,—to the Gare de l'Est,—up the boulevards till I tell you to stop."

She motioned sweepingly into the distance, and climbing into the cab slammed the door shut behind her. Such a smiling happy crowd of people on the boulevards! Her taxi was dodging in and out of the traffic with breath-taking lurches, careening toward the big motor 'busses. Perhaps the driver was drunk

and would smash her up. She did not care much. Evidently he had mistaken her agitation for anxiety to get to the Gare de l'Est. She had just as soon go to the Gare Montparnasse or anywhere else. A depot was a good place to go. She ought to leave Paris. Everybody was too happy in it. They mocked her.

"What I want is somebody to love me." She thought of Henri Bezanne. Was she not his goddess of love? Was he not painting her picture as "Love Awakening"? But Henri was in love with an ideal. He loved beauty alone. Well,—she was the very personification of beauty. Had he not said so?

She would go to his studio, and they would get on with the picture. Perhaps when the dreaming, unworldly painter came to the finishing colours of all her loveliness, and when he was wrapt in contemplation of just how exquisite a woman she was, he would be stirred out of his dreams of shadows and grasp at the reality of beauty before him, and seek to make it his to live with and love and worship forever.

She leaned out of the window and called to her driver. She gave him the painter's address. "Hurry," she said, a madness possessing her to get on, to move, to attain an excitement that would lift her out of herself and her unhappiness. She pictured the studio to which she was going, with its great windows opening on the blue sky and distant white

clouds, and the homely friendliness of funny little Mme. Bezanne, puttering about her son's service.

"You will not hurt my son," the older woman's voice came pleading in her ear, and Mrs. Mayfield cried out defensively, "I don't want to hurt anyone. But everyone hurts me. I have to live for myself. I'll not hurt Henri. I'll make his genius bloom into a greatness that all the world shall recognize."

She was at the studio at last. She took the first flight of stairs almost at a run, and hurried even up the final exhausting one, to beat upon the door impatiently.

"My dear, dear friend," she cried to Henri when he opened the door. "How I have neglected you! We must get on with the picture, or you will lose all desire to finish me. I am a most unreliable model, but I know you will forgive me. You alone, Henri, are—'fidele,'—my other lovers are neither constant nor true."

She laughed excitedly, looking down at his unkempt mane of thick black hair. He was bending over her hands to kiss them. Glancing about the room she saw they were alone. "And your mother, ——?" she inquired.

"*Ma chère Maman* is not well. She has gone to a clinic. Poor woman. She suffers from that which will seize us all before long,—old age."

"Not us, Henri, for years." She stepped back a pace from his eyes, which were regarding her with

puzzled expression. "Do I look as if I were growing old? Is that why nobody loves me? I doubt that. My mirror tells me I am not so far from a girl, and pretty enough to make a *début*. That's why you must get me on canvas so that when I am old I shall be able to sit in my boudoir, and say to myself, 'I used to be that beautiful woman hanging on the wall.' I shall take a great deal of comfort in that, alone with my dog and maybe a canary. I'll have to buy a canary."

"Madame,—Madame, what saddens you to-day that you are so very merry?"

"Nothing at all, Henri, that you and the peace of the studio cannot make well. I love this little retreat from the world, and lying on the *daïs* for you to paint I can think and dream in peace. You are not busy this afternoon?"

"Only at your command."

"Then I will get ready, if you will arrange my mirror and screen, and bring me my warm woolly robe. *Maman* will return soon?"

"Quite soon, *mon amie*." The artist was studying her closely, as she stripped off her gloves, and unpinned her hat. Her cheeks were burning, and her eyes shone with unnatural brilliance.

"We have dallied too long over the painting, for one of my impatient temper,—I could never be an artist. I haven't the slow perseverance. I like to see results, fast." She stabbed her hat with its pins,



and stepping over to the cot by the screen, which had been her disrobing room, dropped it. "I really must have the screen, Henri," she laughed nervously, "I haven't yet acquired the professional *insouciance*.—What are you waiting for?"

The artist strode silently up to her, and she awaited him, confused, embarrassed. He held her shoulders in both his hands, and looked into her eyes, and all at once she felt shamefaced and rebellious, like a little schoolgirl who has been up to mischief and knows that an interrogation is coming from an elder who while loving her, still is passing judgment upon her.

"Someone has been hurting you, Diane."

She noticed that he used her given name, and could not recall that he had ever done so before. His look was brimming with sympathy, and that disturbed her. She did not wish to remember that she needed sympathy. What she had come to Henri's for was to forget everything beyond the studio,—to stir his love, not to awaken his pity. She couldn't stand pity, just now.

"We will get ahead with the painting," he told her quietly, "but you will not need to disarrange yourself, except for your hair." He impelled her gently down upon the cot. "Sit there and I will help you. I'll be your lady's maid. What I want to paint to-day is your eyes, in the shadow of your hair, for they have something in them I never saw

before. I don't quite know what it is, and they puzzle me."

He was withdrawing the hairpins, one by one, and laying them beside her. She looked up at him, her hands folded submissively in her lap.

"Don't you like my eyes, to-day?" she asked.

"I love them every day, Madame,—but to-day they worry me. You see, I have learned that where you are concerned I am man first and artist second. Does that surprise you?"

Her heart was beating riotously, and she revelled in the touch of the strong and gentle fingers that were shaking out the long thick masses of her hair, and smoothing it till it fell about her like a nun's veil, a refuge into which she could retreat, a crown and a cloak, all one, of fragrant softness.

"No, it doesn't, Henri. For you see with you, though I do not love you quite,—not in the sense we usually use the word,—I am always woman first, and model second—and the woman is so fond of you that she's come here to-day to forget everyone else."

"Good," he said briskly. "But be model a little, and we'll talk much. I don't expect you to love me, being content to love you, for there is too vast a chasm between our lives to bridge with such a momentary, delicate, easily shattered emotion as love.—Sit here, where the light falls upon you.—Good! Now tell me what you have been doing, since we were last together."

"I have been to the theatre, for one thing."

"Rash, foolhardy woman! But I used to go before I learned caution."

"Why foolhardy?"

"Is not the world full enough of stimuli to emotion without our going deliberately to have our peace disturbed? When I wish my heart-strings played upon I prefer to be the hand that sets the tune, and not some alien spirit, careless of what happens to me when I begin to vibrate under his touch.

"It is marvellous how daring, or how ignorant, are the great public who buy theatre seats and books. 'Here,' they say, 'is our thirty francs. Lead us to a fauteuil and we will sit passively while you pour into us such things as envies, hates, greeds, or loves, admirations, ambitions. There is so little in our lives that we must enter into the lives of a dozen other persons whom you may evoke for us out of the good or evil of your mind,—we are careless which. We will weep with them, laugh with them, suffer with them and triumph with them because they have become a part of us.' Surely a man's mastery over his ego is too easily overthrown for him to court taking into it the characters and emotions of a dozen others."

The Mayfield inwardly charged him with teasing her. "We need to share the lives of others," she demurred, "and it's less harrowing to share them across footlights or on a printed page, that can be

tossed away, than in the persons of real, flesh and blood people."

"Except that the spectacle of real people is so diverse, and so lacking in conclusions, that we can treat it purely as a show to enjoy. Whereas no novelist and no dramatist is content to do other than force some conclusion down one's throat, some principle or belief on which we may find our future conduct turning. There is a unity of purpose in a play or a book which runs from start to finish, and if it is well shaped, we are speared upon it.

"We can't wriggle off it. Only the bunglers let us escape because they don't interest us. We wish we had our thirty francs back when we are finished with them. Yet they lead us into far less danger than those who give us our thirty francs worth."

"Perhaps there's a unity of purpose in life."

The artist shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he admitted, "but if there is, it's an infinite purpose, and our finite minds can't grasp it. Only priests and old women are sure of it, and can tell you to a nicety just what it is. At any rate, you can withdraw from watching life, into work for instance, and then when you want to be entertained, go out and look it over once more."

He rose and adjusted a white curtain to reflect the light upon his sitter. Then he rattled away cheerily while he moistened and stirred the paints upon his palette, and the Mayfield knew he was trying to dis-



tract her. This ordinarily would have annoyed her, but to-day she did not care. She did not care a great deal what happened. She was weary of guiding her own course and was content to lie passively and toy with thoughts which he tossed her as he painted.

"That's why the boulevard sidewalk café is the best theatre," he was saying. "You only need pay twelve sous for admission and they throw in a good glass of Bordeaux. You can get up and leave at any time, without falling over neighbours or disturbing a performance. And what a spectacle will parade before you! It's spring, now, and sunny, and all the world is out.

"Little girls dressed like brides in flowing dresses and veils of spotless white, walk with awed and dreamy innocence in their eyes on their way to make their first communion. Fat women in stuffy mink coats, their baggy cheeks pink with rouge and white with powder, mince along on tiny shoes that hurt their feet, towed by poodle dogs. Officers of the army in horizon blue, wearing gay ribbons on their breasts and strapped in shiny leather, shorten their strides to the pattering feet of their wives, who are dressed in inexpensive decency and carry big paper bundles from the stores. Old men in rags with bushy white beards and massive heads that remind you of Homer come along and ask you to buy the afternoon paper. A blind man sits on a kerb-stone stool and makes his accordion sing *La Traviata*.

Women as beautiful as orchids flash by, and the scent of flowers stirs your nostrils. Long, sleek motor cars purr past, shining and polished to catch the sun, convoyed by droves of panting, wheezing taxis, almost ready to fall apart. Gamins in black aprons chase each other, jostling the pedestrians, and dignified functionaries with red noses and cocked hats bustle by, filled with importance and beer. There's a show for you. And if it wearies you, there's always the glass at your elbow. I have seen rainbow colours through the bottom of a glass of good bock when it is tilted toward the clouds."

The Mayfield laughed at him. "You will have to take me to your theatre some afternoon," she said, "and explain the plot while I listen to the music."

"Ah! There's a dissipation," he mocked. Then he tore the little frame of canvas on which he was working from the easel, and tossed it disgustedly over toward a pile of others at one side of the room. He drew his chair before her and sat in it, imprisoning both the woman's hands.

"Diane," he said, and his voice was tender. "The goddess of love and beauty whom I started to paint some time ago has disappeared. I think she has been slain. And in her place is a woman who is dear to me,—but only a woman. I know only what I can see, behind the eyes I have been trying to paint, but that is enough to tell me you are in trouble. Can I help you?"

"You are mistaken,—or partly mistaken." Diane replied. She spoke coldly, but her eyes were down-cast, and she half resisted the pressure of his hands, "In the first place I never was a goddess. You shared that illusion with someone else. I never was anything but girl and woman."

"Carrying something of the divine," the artist insisted.

"That which all women carry," she answered, "the capacity of love beyond the power of men to understand. But that little spark of divinity does not seem to be as valuable as I thought it was. So I am forgetting that I ever had it.—Help me? Of course you can, and do. That's why I'm here, because I can sleep,—so far as the life beyond the studio goes,—while you paint me."

She lifted her eyes to meet his squarely. "You haven't room for another lodger here, have you, with dear Maman and King Louis?"

The artist's hands that clutched hers tightened and trembled. He said nothing while he looked away to the windows over the city. Then he arose, but did not then relinquish his clasp upon her hands.

Suddenly they found themselves standing together. His arms were about her, holding her tightly, and both her hands, released, were over his shoulders. Her head was thrown back, her lips parted. Her body, half relaxed, hung for an instant in his embrace, and then, by the arms about his neck was

drawn up closer and more tightly against him. There was a vague singing in her ears, and she felt herself on the verge of tears, while through half opened white teeth an unspoken lament, quite unlike love, was sighing, "I don't care. Life has not played squarely by me." Half aloud she murmured. —"And Henri is sweet."

Still the artist's face was turned from her. His mouth was a sharp straight line.

"Henri," she breathed, and he turned.

Their eyes met once more, and penetrated each in each. Then their lips met, and clung, and strove against each other to drain more,—yet more,—of some elusive draught that would cool the madness racing through them.—It was the woman who awakened first, and trembling sought escape. Her hands pushed his face away, and her face was turned from him. His arms did not let her go till she cried out, "Henri—Henri."

She stepped back and covered her eyes with her hands. Her cheeks were hot and she could not cool them. She walked slowly to the cot, without looking at her companion, piled her fallen hair upon her head and pinned it to stay, with fingers that fumbled and shook. She donned her hat, still without a word, then turned to go.

The artist was seated in his chair, his head buried in his arms, which rested upon its back. Something in his attitude of dejection, or perhaps the black lock



of hair that stood unruly outward from his scalp, perpetually boyish, stirred the woman who watched him. She picked up her gloves and hand-bag and stepped over by his side. He did not raise his head.

She placed one hand upon his shoulder, but still he did not look up.

"I'm sorry, Henri," she said. "That was all my fault." Then she started toward the door.

"Madame," he cried, and swinging on her heel she saw that he had risen. "Madame, I have lost my goddess, but listen." His voice was racked with passion. "You have been hurt and you are pitying yourself. Don't be too careless of others."

"I am a bad woman, Henri, forget me for awhile, and then,——"

The door rattled and opened. Mme. Bezanne entered, with packages from a nearby epicerie, and saw them standing facing her.

"*Mes enfants*,—But you are not departing, Madame, I can make tea in a moment."

"I'm sorry, *maman*," Diane, apologized, smiling through flickering, moistened lashes, and stepping forward, she kissed the white forehead gently. "But I will see you again."

"I'm sorry too, but my son will show you to the door. These stairs grow steeper and steeper. I am afraid every time I think of our friends descending them. They are none too light. Why stand there, Henri? Surely Madame needs a strong arm to help

her to the street, and you used to work in the fields at Avignon."

They went down the stairs together, Mrs. Mayfield accepting a silent escort's arm until they were nearly at street level.

"Do not call yourself bad, Diane," he said. "You are far from that, for as I have learned of people more and more through the years I find so few who are bad,—or good. Only we grope our way through unlit streets many times, and bruise ourselves and others."

In the hall on the ground floor a door opened, and a woman rushed past them shrieking wildly, followed by other women and two men, all running.

"What in the world is that?" asked the Mayfield, as they reached the street door.

A motor ambulance was at the kerb, and from it two rugged, broad-shouldered attendants were drawing a stretcher, bearing a human burden, swathed in white. As the stretcher slid from the flooring of its transport, the woman who had screamed in the hallway flung herself upon it, and again her cries were raised, unrepressed in their agony, to gather a crowd of the curious.

The Mayfield pressed forward. "What has happened?" she asked.

"Come away," cautioned the artist. "Such things are not good to see."

But Diane had noticed that the woman was the

madonna of Henri's studio, the pretty Italian whose baby, nursing at her breast, was to be a Christ Child in some Paris church. She clung to the spot as if fascinated. Bezanne spoke a few words to one of the attendants, and then turned to his companion.

"It is the man of the house who lives below us. You saw his wife and baby the other day. He has been working in the Batignolles tunnel, and there was an accident there this afternoon. Queer thing, too. A stone crusher broke, and a flying fragment of rock hit him in the neck. It cut his throat as cleanly as if it were a knife. There are a thousand ways in which a man may be killed, and the world's industries seems to hold as many of them as its wars."

"How horrible!" the Mayfield shivered.

"It is bad," he agreed, clasping her arm. "A bullet would have been better,—or a shell. I have seen some throats cut in my time, but I never could get used to it, either by bayonet or trench knife. It's too much like the butcher in the slaughter house. Come away and I'll hail a taxi."

The stretcher had been dropped to the sidewalk. The attendants' faces were turned away, but not those of the crowd. The woman bereaved of her wage earner, and the father of her children, was lying half on the sidewalk, and half across the lifeless body, holding it in her embrace and weeping noisily. The sheet which had covered the man was pulled away from his blood-spattered face, a swarthy labourer's

face now strangely yellowish white, and the raw gash across his neck gaped open to morbid eyes. Two *agents de police* were pushing through the crowd and shoving them back, away from the scene of grief.

The Mayfield turned to go. But she had seen the slashed throat, and the white mask of death across the man's face. All at once she sagged against the artist's arm, limply. "I think I am going to faint," she half whispered. Then she shook her head vehemently and straightened up with an effort. "No, I won't—I won't," she denied. "Show me into a taxi quick."

She was swaying, reeling, sick with nausea, but through her giddiness was running the cool and cynical sentence of Sir Humphrey spoken to her but a few hours ago over the telephone from his home to the lobby of Claridge's Hotel:

"Your friend has unfortunately gone into a bad country, where are some people called Touaregs who specialize in cutting throats."

As she collapsed into the tonneau of a taxicab and heard the artist giving the driver her address, and bidding her an "au revoir" she replied to him mechanically. But all her real voice was crying inwardly. "They mustn't do that to Monte.—That's what's going to happen to Monte. Monte! Monte! Monte!"

And her eyes were gazing upon some lonesome barren hill, where lay a lifeless figure with a raw,



yawning red wound across his white throat, and the upturned face was Monte Carroll's.

"They mustn't do that," she sobbed. "Oh Monte! Monte! Monte!"

## CHAPTER XIV

THE Mayfield was pacing her apartment like a caged tigress, raging at enforced inaction, when the clocks of the city's churches were chiming four in the morning. A hot rage, interspersed with spasms of cold fear.

Even now, while the minutes were crawling so slowly across the dial of the hours, Monte Carroll might be approaching all too swiftly the fate prepared for him by his sinister foe. For all she knew he might be even now lying lifeless in some wasteland, victim of savages, his body left for prey to gathering buzzards, and all his red stream of life that had bubbled so strongly within him seeping into the sands and drying from the pool about his gashed throat. The Mayfield caught at her own ivory, blue-veined throat in horror at the vision that recurred to her again and again. She could see his pathetically still body so clearly, if she stopped from pacing and from planning how she was to reach him, and avert him from his peril.

She had done all she could do before morning, that

wan, pale dawning that seemed as if it would never arrive. In the first place she had summoned Hubert, good old steady, reliable Hubert, to come as fast as a motor would carry him to her apartment. There she had sobbed to him the story of her love and her hate, and of the old intriguing gold gatherer who sought to acquire her as the symbol of his wealth and power,—all the story, of her early love for Monte and her shame,—in a complete break-down of reserves,—how she had indeed plotted and planned the vilest murder, which now must not happen. It must not! It could not! All that she had in the way of wealth must be summoned at once to forestall it. She must go herself to warn her man and save him. She did not hate him. She loved him so much she did not care what happened to her, or whether he ever returned her anything but the scorn he had manifested toward her. He must be safe from harm. He must be happy. That was the goal of her life, and she would lay down her life if need be to accomplish it. And he, Hubert, must help her, for old friendship's sake, and for Madge's sake, with whom she knew he was really in love desperately, though he could not know how terrible and how strong a love could be to possess one. Women only knew that, and she most of all women.

Hubert had puffed a veritable screen of blue smoke about him from a knobby brier pipe that ordinarily he did not bring into human society, but reserved for

the unravelling of tangled problems in his rooms. Fortunately he had put the pipe in his trousers pocket when he doffed his smoking jacket, donned his dinner coat and jumped for a taxi at the Mayfield's frantic phone call. Great old brier! It made the brain hit smoothly on all cylinders. By the time the sorry story of the stricken woman had given way to a final burst of tears he was well on his way to a plan of action.

First of all, Carroll's home office in New York must be cabled. It would know just where the beggar had gone. Secondly, he must hop over to a friend of his at the Embassy. He would hunt up a military attaché who could inveigle a plane for him to fly out of the aërodrome at Le Bourget, preferably a single-seater with a good Lewis gun, and he'd be at Marseilles directly; thence to Algiers, and thence in pursuit of the oil man wherever he had gone. The French had a sprinkling of military posts all over that country and there would be no danger of getting far from a supply of gas. He hadn't flown since the war, but he would wager he had not lost his cunning at the controls. He had heard of the Touaregs somewhere in North Africa,—wild riders, he understood, who loved a fight. They always could be depended upon to give the French a skirmish when they were in need of training. But ground troops couldn't stand against machine gunning from the air, as he blessed well tested for himself on several occasions.



The Mayfield would not hear of his going alone on an errand of that kind. He must get a two-seater. She would fly to Monte if it were the last act of her life. She would see him safe and then go away somewhere and try to forget him.

When Hubert swore she was crazy, she admitted that perhaps she was, but she intended to go, and that was all there was to it. He refused point-blank to take her, and she invented out of imagination a French captain who would be glad to carry her along on such a sporting proposition. She even went to the telephone to call up this imaginary airman. Hubert changed his peremptory refusal of her wishes to an attitude of wheedling, coaxing her not to take such a risk. And finally he grumbly consented, quoting an old adage about "needs must when the devil drives." He warned her then that he doubted whether he could find a two-seater at Le Bourget, or even if the French would let him take any plane at all.

But she laughed to scorn that suggestion. She threatened to go along with him to the aërodrome if there was any doubt of his success. "I'll get them to lend me a squadron, with a couple of bombers thrown in for good measure," she boasted. "My captain Lefevre will get them for me."

So Hubert had "popped off" on his errand to the Embassy, and to Le Bourget, and to the Bourse to send a cable to Carroll's home office, after routing

a consul-general from his bed to get the cable address of the Gulf oil people.

The Mayfield was left to tramp her rooms, disregarding the protests of Lysiane, and her insinuations that Madame would show the ravages of a sleepless night in the morning. She packed the girl off to her room, and continued to tramp, or to drop into a chair and bury her face in her arms and try to think, or to jump up again and straighten a picture awry on the wall that annoyed her nerves.

What a sad wreck she had made of her life! And not only of her own,—for that would not be so bad,—but of Monte's. She was leading him to his death. Probably he was only going on this business trip into Africa to get away from being near her. Had he not said in the taxicab, just before that one long, sweet kiss, that he was confronted once more with the task of trampling on memories of her? Had he not confessed that he was afraid his old longing for her would return? She took some sad comfort in this, but it was swept away by the agony of her anxiety for him.

She paced the floor, back and forth, crumpling a tiny piece of lace and linen in her hands, and crying "Monte—Monte— They must not hurt you, dear," by the voice of her heart, when her lips were closed tightly and trembling to keep a brave straight line.

She could not spend a whole night in this fashion,

and she could not sleep. Would the dawn never come? She tried recalling old scenes wherein they two had played together, and all the little triumphs of her youth in the growing realization that the big boy loved her, mutely and awkwardly at first, and later flamingly passionate, so that she could make him miserable or happy as she pleased, so that he would trot to her heel like a faithful hound for awhile, then withdraw from all men and women and sulk and contemplate deeds of reckless dare-devilry that should make her sorry for the way she treated him.

She conjured up pictures of him to cross her eyes: Monte diving from the high pier at Marblehead, straight out into space like a gliding bird, then turning in mid-air and straightening again to drop like a plummet, cleaving the clean and shining waters with scarcely a ripple, and emerging with a whoop of joy to await her as she launched her own pulsing, glowing body into the air to dive in a proud and perfect arc into the ocean beside him.

There was Monte at the tiller of her knockabout sloop, driving it with the lee rail a-wash and the wind threatening to pull the mast from its socket, carrying too much sail because it was more happily dangerous so, while she lay along the windward rail and helped to ballast the craft against capsizing.

What clean and healthy summers in New England! Her sophisticated friends at Deauville or the Riviera would laugh at the thrills of toasting

“wieners” over a drift-wood fire on some beach at the end of a straw-ride. They would prefer to give their jaded appetites a fillip with the marvellous creations of some Latin chef, while they thrilled over the chances of the baccarat or chemin-de-fer tables. They would have orchestras playing music which had stood the test of destroying years and still was beautiful. But the “wiener” toasters on the beaches at home were singing for themselves, making their own music, rag-time doggerel ditties, born only a month ago to pass into unregretted oblivion a month hence, but in their brief lives to give young lovers a catchy and hilarious tune to blend in sporano and bass, with perhaps a couple of tenors off-key, and a ukulele to strum out basic chords that would do as well for one song as another.

As Diane strode her apartment she longed to bring those scenes back in reality as she was doing in memory. But even as she longed for them came the bitter conviction and certain knowledge that she had grown into other habits, and that those “silly” gatherings would bore her to exasperation.

She was now the Mayfield, the noted beauty of Paris, pampered and sensuous, so that she partook of life like a connoisseur gaining more exquisite pleasures by her knowledge, but shuddering at the enthusiastic satisfactions of youth. And she realized that she paid the penalties that critics have to pay for their over-refinement of taste.



It would be only for to-night, when she yearned for the man who had gone into peril, that the rewards and penalties of civilization escaped her. For to-night she was stripped of her refinements. She was primitive and savage. The man whom she had always meant for her mate, the man whom she loved, was in danger. All forgetful of self she would fight to save him.

She stood on the Bokharan rug of her bedroom. Before her was the "prie-dieu," stolen from an ancient rural sanctuary to be sold as satisfaction for the possessive instincts of a wealthy curio collector. There was the low stool, and rail for the knees and elbows of worshippers, and there, hung upon His cross, was the piteous figure of the Son of God, an oaken, painted image, rudely but lovingly wrought. His agonized face was thrown back toward heaven; His nail-pierced hands and feet were discoloured with dark-red splashes.

Something as instinctive moved in the woman, afraid, and fighting for self control, as moved within the first pagan who ever fell to his knees before a great rock of curious shape.

She was in the grip of fear. She was in need of help. Surely somewhere off in the great empyrean spaces lived a great Power to whom the troubles of puny men were trifles easily lifted when too great for them to bear. And this great Power was good, and

loved men so much—that he gave “His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth——”

Echoes of words that had been heard and forgotten, years ago, words drilled rigorously into her brain when it was plastic and half-formed, when she walked every Sunday to church, all starched and crinkly as to clothes, all awkward legs and arms as to form, washed till her face shone with high lights in the sun like a rosy apple, with her thick hair braided meticulously down her spine and be-ribboned at the waist with an enormous bow—words laid down in indisputable authority by omniscient elders, and a parson formidable in his high white collar and his wrath towards unbelievers—these were the words and thoughts that coursed through the mind and heart of the Mayfield in her anguish.

She dropped on her knees before the extended figure of the Christ, hanging there before her as the symbol of a divine Love which had taken upon Itself the sorrows of mankind to bear and endure.

“Dear God!” she sobbed. “Save Monte,— Dear God, save Monte!”

Four little words repeated again and again, to comfort herself, while the tears coursed unchecked down her cheeks and she gazed through their mist at the cross. Even as she murmured the words of her prayer, and clung to them as to a black-magic formula for healing her woes, and told them to the crucifix as often as ever nun told bead after bead of her

rosary, she felt a spirit of calm hovering over her. She was at least doing something now to save him. She was praying. That was better than the absolute, maddening inaction which she had suffered through the night.

But as the burst of passion which had brought her to its knees spent its force, and no sign came from the carved oaken image that her words were heard, and no voice from beyond that image answered the cry in her heart, the words that formed upon her trembling lips became less and less fervent, less of a prayer than a clever formula for self-hypnosis into an elusive peace, and finally not even that. A mere empty mockery, signifying nothing. She had prayed unanswered, even as she might have expected, she reproached herself. She had been broken a little by the strain under which she had been while waiting for news from Hubert, and had slipped back into her childhood. Even as the thought flashed through her, another childhood memory came to cap it. "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Well, she did not care particularly about entering the Kingdom of Heaven. All she cared about was Monte, a flesh and blood man on this earth. It would be time enough to consider heaven when she was in her dotage and liable to exchange this world for another one.

All that she cared about was Monte, and it was

unlikely that heaven would intervene in his behalf when the upraised dagger of a Touareg assassin was poised above his throat and ready to strike. How many mothers and wives and sweethearts had prayed for such intervention during the great war? For the deflection of missiles scientifically and accurately launched straight at their men-folk to annihilate them? And how many of the men had been saved from death because of those saintly prayers? Few, she would wager, wiping her eyes. Whatever might be the infinite plan of God directing His world, it did not take into account the personal, physical fortunes or lives of individuals,—they were too pettily small in the great scheme of things, too momentary in the vast sweeps of time stretching onward into infinity and backward toward the creation of things, more centuries than one generation of men could reckon.

If Monte was to be helped, she and Hubert would have to do it, quite humanly and without divine assistance. She rose slowly and wearily from her knees, bitter and disappointed.

Grey daylight was piercing the cracks in her heavily shuttered windows, and the twittering of birds was beginning to herald the dawn out-doors. She threw the shutters wide open and leaned out to inhale the dewy coolness of her garden. Its shrubs and lawn were freshly wet and breathing fragrance. Each tree was alive with feathered songsters. She stood there drinking the morning air in great inspiring,



heartening draughts. Too pretty a world for grief to be its outcome! Hubert would be here soon, and they would fly together in pursuit of the man who was fleeing from her love to an unknown danger.

They would save him, surely. It could not be too late, and then,—ah, then perhaps he would love her. He had scores enough against her. Perhaps she could wipe them out at one stroke, and force his arms once more to encircle her. She would slip into their embrace like a homing bird into its nest.

Meanwhile she must get out her tweed knickers for the trip into the desert, and a leather fleece-lined great-coat for the ride by air, and pack a little satchel full of necessities, and consult her bank statement. She prepared to descend on the cashier for every last sou, to be strapped in a money belt about her waist.

Making these preparations, and refreshing herself from the ravages of a sleepless night served to pass the time till Lysiane awoke, and hastened to join her mistress, whom she heard most strangely bustling about. The girl was ordered to the kitchen. By the time the Hon. Hubert arrived with a long, urgent ring at the door-bell there was a steaming hot “American” breakfast ready to be laid for two.

Hubert was so excited that he had forgotten his stick. Otherwise he seemed his normal, matter-of-fact self. “Can’t possibly get a return cable here from the States before noon,” he told her. “Have

to allow for the five hours difference in New York and Paris time. Meanwhile I've enlisted all kinds of johnnies to help me, without telling them enough to worry them or us. Called Madge on the phone, but she didn't know where her precious brother had gone. Going to call on her when I get back, though."

"That's fine, Hubert,—and in the interim a little breakfast?"

"Wouldn't be bad. Neither would a nap, but I've an appointment with a chap who was liaison officer with us from the French army in '17 to go out to Le Bourget and try my hand at the joy-stick of a sweet little Farman plane. And if he can't get it for me for a few days, we've arranged to pick up an old two-seated Handley-Page. This chap is an ordnance man now, in the piping times of peace, and he'll have a Vickers gun mounted on it before noon, if we can't get the Farman. That's a simpler trick to work. Simply point the plane and let fly with everything in your gun straight through the propeller. With the Vickers mounted on a swivel at your side it's a little harder,—got to fly and aim separately,—but I've not forgotten how. Great lark, it ought to be, so buck up. We don't go out flying on little wars of our own every day in the year."

He entertained her, obviously delighted with his prospect of taking to the air once more, while Lysiane brought in a trayful of eatables, fruit and American

cereal, toast and coffee, steaming under its snowy covering.

"A little bit all right," he commented. "I've rushed all over Paris and put away just enough whiskies to give me the appetite of a horse."

"There are ham and eggs coming later."

"Ripping!" He ate with a will.

The terrors of the night faded with the sun of a gorgeous day, and with the companionship of two people bent on common adventure. Hubert waxed technical over planes and things aëronautical, and Diane gave him pseudo-attention just as if she understood what he was talking about, while her mind, relaxed, was free to envisage the coming flight, and a meeting with her man, grown contrite and suppliant.

By the time Hubert was ready to leave for Le Bourget she had recovered her self-possession, save for occasional qualms lest they be late in their pursuit.

She sped him off with a command to telephone her just as quickly as his man gave him word that the cable from America had arrived. That would be after eleven, and meanwhile she would go down town and get some money. He could take her satchel. Would it be cold during the nights where they were going? She showed him her knicker suit, and her great-coat, and he rendered masculine approval. Then he was gone.

Alone once more she had to fight hard a few minutes to keep from giving way to her fears for Monte. But by repeating her belief that she would save him, and that he would love her, she stilled her trepidation until her motor sounded its horn at the porte-cochère.

Then she rode down town to Papa Coudikis to obtain a great roll of thousand franc notes. "You must be going to buy the Luxembourg," was his comment, "or do you fear for the safety of our vaults?"

"I'm going on a little trip," she told him, "and I have been economical all my life. If I want anything extravagant I'm going to get it."

"All right, princess," he laughed indulgently. "I suppose you can always get more, but keep away from roulette. And remember that handsome men are sometimes wolves in disguise."

"Ah, but we know where I can find a protector, do we not?" She smiled her way out, while he chuckled after her. "The minx."

Thence home again, to receive a message from Hubert.

"Come to the aërodrome at once."

Her heart turned a somersault. She did not stop to dress. Clutching her tweed suit, wool stockings, sport shoes and blouse in her arms, she ran downstairs to her chauffeur, and hurled the clothes into the tonneau before her.



"With all speed," she ordered, giving the man her destination. She climbed into the car and drew its curtains shut. The car rolled out of the gravel drive, picked up speed, and hummed for the city's outer gates, while Mrs. Mayfield ripped at her morning dress with absolute disregard whether she left it in anything but shreds. She had changed to her flying costume before reaching Le Bourget.

Hubert was standing by a blue-clad, rifle-bearing sentinel at the gate of the military field, and beside him stood a smart French officer, whom he introduced as an old friend in the war.

"We got a radio through the American Embassy," he told her. "Carroll has gone with a party of geologists and surveyors to El-Bekdar, a thousand miles into the desert. It's rocky, hilly country, and there's a report that there's oil there. Beats the devil how they'd get it out even if they found it. A thousand miles of pipe line to guard and keep in repair across that country. But where there's wealth enough to be brought out there's money enough to bring it. It must be across into Spanish territory they're heading, because every French concession would go to Sir Humphrey. But we ought to be able to catch them before they enter the desert. They only left Algiers a week ago, and it should take them about a week to pick up a camel train and supplies once they get to El-Bekdar. That's two days more. And we can get there in a day and a half if we're lucky."

They were striding swiftly across the field toward the hangars, the woman between her two escorts. Hubert assured her that their companion knew enough to keep a secret.

"He has sent a wire to the French military post at El-Bekdar to detain Carroll if he hasn't started into the sand," he said.

Before one of the open sheds a great Farman bi-plane was standing like a grotesque bird. Its motor had been running, but was shut off as they approached. An oily, overalled "non-com." hopped out of its cockpit as they came up. He saluted his superior and informed him that the engine was purring smoothly.

With a few words of thanks and farewell, Hubert and the girl shook hands with the French officer, and climbed into their seats. The Briton adjusted the Mayfield's straps, and made her comfortable. His war-time friend had climbed on the fuselage and was giving him final instructions about the plane and its charts.

"Thanks awfully," yelled the Briton as he started the motor with a roar. The propeller before them began to whirl.

"Bonne chance," cried his friend, and jumped to earth. A moment later with a snort and a burst of smoke the plane lurched off. There was a short run over the field, and then Diane felt the earth drop away from beneath her.

## CHAPTER XV

THE earth travelled fast away from them. Its formidable men turned to ridiculous pigmies, and then to ant-like specks, and vanished. The houses became like children's toys and tall trees like tufts of heavier grass upon an uneven turf; the farms of the sturdy French peasants were tiny rectangles of green and brown; and the Seine extended to their view like a serpent of silver wriggling down country toward Rouen and the sea.

They left the river behind them and headed south, climbing higher, so that the world was no longer of enough consequence to bother watching it, and they hung suspended, seemingly motionless in empty space. Only the uneven air in which their plane was lifted and dropped like a boat on a choppy sea served to tell the Mayfield that they were moving. But leaning a little from the shelter of the cockpit the rush of the wind informed her they were travelling fast.

Diane was warm in her coat of leather, and she had passed a sleepless night. The sensation of flying was not new to her, and she was happy because she was

on her way to Monte. She had implicit confidence in Hubert, whose broad back turned every now and then for a delighted grin to be cast over his shoulder. He communicated an obvious pleasure at returning to an old game which now was sport, even if once it had been war. As the world faded into nothingness she yawned with sleep, fought against it only half-heartedly, and soon was nodding in the midst of pleasant dreams.

Smiles wreathed her lips. She was sure she was jogging along in an old farm buggy just north of Boston, between the apple orchards of Carrollton. It was a sunny Spring day. All the trees were pink and white, and Monte was driving the sleepy nag that alternated between drawing a plough and amusing children out at the old Carroll farm. He was explaining to her a wonderful new method of catching snakes, with two sticks, one forked and the other carrying a noose of string to slip around their tails. And while she shivered a little she told him she was not afraid, and he retorted, "Aw, I'll betchy-are. But I'm not afraid of snakes. I like 'em. I'm going to India to hunt boa constrictors as soon as I get enough money in the bank." And then they speculated together on how far it was to "India's coral strand," and Monte agreed to take her if Mrs. Barrett would let her go.

The Mayfield could see her mother setting a freshly baked pie upon the kitchen window sill, out under



the morning-glory and wisteria vines that climbed over their back "stoop." And even as she watched it, and her mouth watered for its crisp, warm, flaky crust, and for the oozing syrup that lapped each cinnamon tintured crescent of baked apple within, a grimy hand crept over the window ledge and the pie disappeared. She was running down the gravel path toward the back gate and crying midst tears of rage toward a small boy who ran like a deer, "Monte Carroll, you bring that back, I saw you and I'll tell your father."

She awoke at that, and struggled for a moment of panic against the confinement of the straps that held her. The bulkiness of her wrappings was strange for one waking from a dream. She should be turning and stretching beneath the downy comfort of her quilt. And then, wide awake, she recalled where she was. She leaned out and gulped a stiff drink of the rushing breeze, and wondered how far they had gone.

The earth had completely vanished and they were plunging through blue space shot with gold sunbeams. Underneath them was a rolling grey mist. Hubert's broad back was impassive, motionless, and he was facing straight through the propellers. She leaned forward and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned about and laughed.

"Had a good nap?" he shouted.

She nodded smilingly. "Have we gone far?"

Hubert looked at his wrist watch. "Due south by

the compass," he said. "Two hours. I'm going to drop pretty soon and we'll see where we are. We ought to be over Lyons, or near there, another two hours to Marseilles."

The Mayfield automatically checked his statement by her watch. Just a little past noon, and they had left Le Bourget at ten o'clock. She relapsed into thought. Flying was almost as monotonous as riding long distances through barren country upon a train.

She was going to save Monte, and travelling fast to bridge the gap between them. What if it should not be fast enough? She shook the thought away impatiently. It must be. Surely no such disaster would befall her as Monte's death.

And she was going to try once more to win his love. Once in the desert by his side, he could not escape her so easily. She would be infinitely more lovely in the barrenness of the surroundings. The skies of the tropics would be above them. And he could not resist her.

What was the strength of his eight-year-old bitterness against the pulsing presence of her day by day and night by night, close to his side, appealing and tender, elusive and gay, sparkling a little to dazzle him, and a confidential comrade in the midst of alien natives, treacherous sands, burning heat? She wondered if after saving him, she would have still further opportunities to help him. That led her into speculation as to what she could do for him as help-mate,

when once they were married, and she was spurring him onward in his chosen career, comforting him at temporary defeats, and giving him all her feminine intuitions for counsel.

Somehow she did not want him to be too easily successful. She wanted the chance to pillow his blue-black curly hair upon her shoulder, and stroke the worries from his forehead, and intersperse encouragements with kisses that should express her absolute worship and confidence. And she wanted him to go back to America. There he would carve out such a place for himself that women would envy her. They would whisper in hotels and theatres, on the streets and in fashionable assemblies, "That's Mrs. Montgomery Carroll. Isn't she stunning? My dear, he makes just loads of money. They say he's the real brains of the Gulf Oil. Just look at those furs! He's crazy about her."

The roar of the motor suddenly was stilled, and Diane felt herself thrown hard against the strap which held her to her seat. They were diving, nose down, through a cloud that drenched them in its dark mist. Emerging from it, with the bright world in clear view beneath them, they straightened out and sped forward. The motor once again hummed powerfully and smoothly.

Beneath them were the broad, peaceful waters of the Rhône, slipping with imperceptible motion to join the deep Mediterranean. Rolling hills of fertile

farm land lay beneath them, dotted with hamlets roofed in pink, blue, grey, and brown, a gay country, brave with colour. Far to the east rose the white crags of the Alps, and as they dropped lower and lower they could see a great palace, its pinnacles tipped with fire where the sun played upon its windows, and Hubert shouted that they were passing Avignon, ancient home of the popes.

A glorious day,—and they were flying above the earth like super-men, their mighty engine singing its song of power in their ears,—a power that leaped over continents and annihilated space,—and they were its masters, only a little less than gods. The Mayfield felt stirred to sing at the wonder of it, and Hubert smiled back at her in understanding appreciation of all she felt.

"Sur le pont d'Avignon,  
L'on y danse, l'on y danse,"

What poems the old troubadours would have sung to their ladies if instead of dancing across the bridge they had flown over it, a mile in the air! If only Hubert were Monte, and they two there flying together in a perfection of sympathy that made speech unnecessary, watching the beautiful, miraculous world which had lived all these centuries with the one aim and goal of bringing their two hearts together!

A long flight to Marseilles, four hours, passed in contentment. Diane was too wrapped in sensation



to think of the chances of evil still waiting them, once they had reached the desert. Four hours in which to doze and dream, and wake to sing, or to stretch her arms to the sun, and revel in the charm of the pastoral country they were spanning.

Now they were a scant thousand feet above the ground, and off to the south they could see the haze of smoke above a great city, and then a deeper blue than even the sky. Or was it just a mirage? More minutes passed, and she was sure that the blue was really sea, the Mediterranean. It would not be long before she would be seeing it dotted with the bright orange and dull brown triangular lateen sails of the fishing craft, that bobbed upon its inshore waters. She would be watching some stately steamer ploughing its way through a wreath of white foam at its bow, headed for the open ocean and distant lands, and leaving behind it a long trail of fleecy black smoke, to be dissipated and vanish in lacy wisps of dull steel grey against the sky. The chimneys of the city began to appear like tiny black stalks with tufts of blue-black foliage. And then a thousand roofs, with odd chimney pots and gables, emerged from the dimness of distance and took their shape before her eyes, and on a distant hill-top was a great cathedral.

The city was set upon a hill, and crowning the hill was a great open field, toward which they glided. Upon its borders they finally saw the expected hangars, and then in front of them, running about

excitedly, little brown-clad men, who turned out to be mechanics of the French air force. With motor cut off, they swooped down near them. Their plane taxied in a series of bumps and pitches across the field.

Hubert was unstrapping himself, and turning toward her. "Like it as far as you've gone?"

"Wild about it. Let's keep right on."

"We will after we get a bite to eat and give the engine its meal. I think we've time before night to hop to Algiers,—a great trick, and a wonderful engine,—smooth as silk."

He helped her out of her harness, and handed a note of introduction to a dapper little officer with bristling mustachioes and shiny glasses. The officer read the note and greeted them cordially. But he was amazed at their plan to keep straight on across the Mediterranean without escort. Certainly the army fliers did it frequently, on business, and testing their craft, but millionaire sportsmen never. Why risk it?

They laughed him down, and Hubert with pardonable "swank" showed him his honourable discharge from the British flying forces, with his citations written thereon. Then they found mutual acquaintances in the great war adventure, that now was slipping so far to rearward that it seemed sometimes like ancient history. And they talked motors to each other with great mutual respect.

It was after two o'clock. They accepted the

officer's invitation to luncheon, and spent an hour with him, while the mechanics prepared their plane anew for flight. The officer whisked them in a military automobile to a plaza over-looking the town and ocean, where they ate under green palm trees. They quenched their thirst with a rose-coloured wine that left them all uplifted in spirit and great friends. The officer was assured that they would return some time to his city perhaps to play a little lawn tennis or "vingt-et-un," and certainly to have another luncheon upon the same spot, with the sparkling sea at their feet, and out in the harbour the grim stone fortress whence Monte Cristo dived to freedom.

Back to the aërodrome they sped. Diane and Hubert mounted their charger of the sky. The officer bade them farewell and good luck, and gave Hubert careful instructions about the landing field toward which he was headed. Then away the adventurers flew, smoke and fire belching from the plane's exhaust. They took the air with a swift upward rush and a tricky "figure eight" by Hubert, who was "feeling his oats" at being back at the controls of a plane. They headed out across an expanse of water turned purple and gold in the afternoon light.

Four hours more of flight they spent, across the open sea, their motor throbbing steadily, and so high that they had not even a sea-gull for company. When they approached the African coast, the night

was falling. The flaming colours of a tropical sun-down were fading into darkness. But rising upward to their lonely height the twinkling stars of the coast-wise lights were flashing them friendly messages of welcome once more to the habitation of men.

From Marseilles their military mentor had radioed news that they were on their way. A huge beacon-fire had been lit on the flying field, to guide them. Hubert "pan-caked" down beside it weary and ready for sleep. His companion was sparkingly gay with excitement.

"Oh Hubert, it was wonderful," she cried, as he fumbled with her straps.

But after the strenuous exertions of the day, Hubert could not enter into her enthusiastic praises.

"You, poor dear, you're dead. But I could fly right on into the night. Look at the moon. Do you suppose we could hit it? It makes me all full of music inside."

"I'd rather be full of food and tucked into bed," he commented, lifting her to the edge of the cockpit. They climbed down into a circle of soldiers. Again they gave their credentials, and were extended a welcome. A group of khaki-clad colonial officers pressed to hear details of the flight. Finally Hubert succeeded in satisfying their curiosity sufficiently so that one of them offered his car to take them to a hotel. In its glaring lobby, where the western world was listening to western music, and playing in smart



evening clothes on the border of an Oriental desert, they parted for the night. The Mayfield was torn between an excited desire to join the gaiety, and the fatigue of the journey which commanded her to retire.

Her room could have been no better even in Paris, so modern had the foreign quarter of Algiers become under the management of the French, striving to recoup part of their war losses by playing host to American and English tourists. Between fresh sheets on a luxurious bed, with windows thrown wide to the desert coolness, the Mayfield stretched and yawned, comfortable as a cat on a hearthrug.

How surprised Monte would be to see her! What queer tricks life played on people! They had little dreamed, back in the days of skating together on the Charles, or going to dressed-up parties, or motoring out over the North Shore roads, that some day Monte would be riding camel-back into an ambushade of death on the far distant Sahara, and that she would be speeding to his rescue by aëroplane. Why, it seemed only a few days ago that they had gone together to a swampy field at Squantum, and seen that pioneer of British airmen, Grahame-White, astound the natives by flying five hundred feet in the air, sitting out in front of a rickety, engine-bearing, kite-like contraption, with two little propellers revolving back of him for all the world like a couple of electric fans. How the world moved! The Mayfield's

breathing was more and more regular and deep. She slept soundly and heavily, without a motion nor a dream, till the hot sun of a new day poured into her window.

From Algiers to El-Bekdar was five hundred miles as crows and men fly. Under a flaming sun, their heads protected by pith helmets, and their eyes by dark glasses, Diane and Hubert droned it off in their plane in about five hours. And at El-Bekdar they obtained word of the man they sought.

He had gathered a camel train during the past week, and two days before had plunged into the desert with two white companions, and a troop of fifty native servants, for an unknown destination. A quiet, strange man was Mr. Starret. But masterful, and wise to the ways of the desert. In picking his camel train, he had unfailingly distinguished between the scoundrels who would have robbed him, and a faithful sheik on whom the French relied for loyalty. His train was equipped with provisions for a month, and was well armed. So although they had been puzzled by his reticence about whither he was going, they had helped him as much as they could at the military post. They had noted that his papers were in order, and had wished him *bonne chance* on his errand.

He had gone east toward the Spanish territory, through hilly country known for its sheep herds, and fairly well supplied with springs. He would skirt

the great sand waste for a day if he was headed for Marouf, the nearest Spanish military post. Thence he would have only one peril in his path, the common one of the desert, roving marauders. And he was armed well enough to cope with them unless they were in unusual force.

El-Bekdar was a sun-parched hamlet of pink and white stucco houses, flat-roofed and devoid of window panes, enclosing a stockaded fort in which the French had a garrison of one company of Moroccans under white officers and a squadron of airmen. It was the farthest military outpost in the desert.

The officers were cordial to the Mayfield and Hubert as only lonesome Europeans marooned in an eastern native wilderness can be. They made the two visitors a gay company at mess. The officers were pleasantly curious about their trip, and anxious to be of assistance. They advised against pushing on in the plane, once they learned it was their plan to join Starrett, as the country was rugged and landings might be difficult. Beyond a day's flight they would have to abandon their ship for lack of gas. But when the pursuers expressed their determination to be on their way after the shortest of rests, and their hosts perceived that there was a mysterious urgency about their errand, they laughingly gave them what advice they could, and swore only beneath their breaths that they were foolhardy.

Questioned as to the matter of marauders the

soldiers scoffed at first, but on being pressed for details of Touareg raids, admitted they were fairly frequent against small bodies of travellers daring the expanse to Timbuctoo and points south.

The Touaregs would not be so bad, they were informed, if they were not in many cases headed by renegade deserters from the foreign legion, skilled in the art of warfare. These leaders were mostly Germans, officers of the old Kaiserist army, who had clung to their trade after the armistice, and enlisted in some numbers under the banners of their erstwhile foes, the French, for service in the tropics.

Those who had been unable to stand the drop in prestige from junker officer-dom to the humble ranks frequently had deserted their units. They had stolen munitions and supplies in several large groups. They had penetrated the desert, and in some cases had achieved a little of their old arrogant leadership, by gathering under their standard small bands of native cut-throats. They lived in the tent caravans of the waste-land after the manner of Oriental potentates. Some said they had the backing of European money, and were in communication with several of Europe's chancellories.

The Mayfield had heard enough to make her chafe at every minute's delay in getting on with the journey. These renegades were indeed backed from Europe, she was sure. They were in communication with at least one unscrupulous man of power. Sir Humphrey



would not have been so certain of Carroll's impending doom if he had not laid the plot that would bring it about. Even now, sitting amidst these supposed friends, they might be conversing with some spy of Humphrey's. All their doings would be reported to his office off the Champs Élysées as fast as his marvellous underground communications system could carry code messages. There was a wireless in the post. She would be willing to wager that Sir Humphrey knew about her trip and envisaged her object, before she was well out of the stockade.

"Can't we start," Diane whispered to Hubert, tensely, in the midst of the chatter. He pressed her arm with a sympathetic smile, and started to wonder audibly as to the progress of the mechanics with his plane. Striding back towards the hangars he encouraged her.

"We'll catch him before night," he said. "Two days' marching won't carry him as far as we'll go in an hour or so. We'll just circle low until we find him. Then it's up to you."

They zoomed over the flat roofs of the village with a wave of farewell to the military, and to the white burnous-clad natives in the streets and on the house-tops. They headed East into the open country, hugging the earth within a few hundred feet, and the Mayfield unslung her field glasses to bring each rocky ravine and shrub-clad slope into clear view.

They passed the bad land, over parched brown

grass which lay for miles near the green palms and greener lawns of the oasis which had determined the site of the village. Then they headed out across the seemingly limitless sea of hot white sand, which rolled and billowed in hills and valleys, monotonously onward to the distant sky-line. After two hours of travel, Hubert swung his plane south in a wide circle.

"They can't have gone this far," he shouted. "We'll circle back to the village from the south and then try by the north if we haven't found them."

But they discovered them on the return flight. From afar off they saw such a concourse of men, and such a commotion, as made the Mayfield's heart suddenly catch in her throat, and a wild excitement possess her.

"Hurry—hurry——" she whispered to the plane, and to Hubert she shouted, "Look—look—there they are!"

But Hubert was already using one free hand to slip a belt of cartridges into the breech-block of the wicked black gun which was trained straight over the front of his cockpit.

As they swooped nearer and nearer the assemblage on the desert, the Mayfield saw clearly the struggle which was taking place on its lonely expanse.

Upon a slight rise of ground was a circle of camels, lying prone and still. The packs upon their backs formed a rude breastwork back of which a group of

men were lying, their rifles trained outward, and shooting at a company of wild desert tribesmen. The natives were mounted on horses that ran in swift charges almost up to the besieged force, only to break and flee, then return once more to combat. Diane could hear no sound as yet of the firing. But she could see the battle as a picture, white smoke and flashes of flame from the guns, and the veering, swaying white phantom-like riders, roving in wide circles and swift dashes about their hemmed-in prey.

As the fliers came nearer they could see that the attacking force was not escaping scatheless. Here and there a riderless horse stood still, and a body lay quiet in the sand. The plane was almost on the scene of battle. The tribesmen had seen it. Stray horsemen were gathered in excited groups, gesticulating wildly, then dashing away.

"Let 'em have it," yelled Hubert. His erstwhile calm was shattered. He was whooping like a Comanche.

The Mayfield's ears caught the deadly rattle of his machine gun's voice as it spoke above the roar of the engine. No sooner had it opened fire than the attacking force broke into scattering units. They fled, then turned to resist. Their rifles were aimed against the plane, so that bullets hummed little spiteful songs about the Mayfield's ears.

Hubert swung to within scant yards of earth, rushing to attack small groups, and then pursuing fugi-

tives. His weapon took deadly effect. Marauders pitched headlong in death from their horses. Then all the Touaregs fled. They melted into the desert, in scattering, lonely black and white specks that merged into the protective white of their native element, hopelessly routed and decimated. Hubert swung his plane back to the group of camels and the defenders upon the hill. He dropped his plane into the sand, and with its wheels clogged it rolled and staggered only a few yards. Then it tipped upon its nose and the whirling propeller snapped as it struck earth.

Before Hubert had time to do more than fumble at his straps, Diane was out of hers. She leaped from the fuselage and was running across the desert toward the camel-ringed fort.

"Monte,—Monte," she was calling. "Are you safe?"

She felt a numbing blow in the back and pitched face downward in the sands. An instant only as she fell was she conscious of a bewildered surprise. Something had struck her. Something had happened to her. Then all the world turned blood red, then black, and she struggled helplessly to arise. She lost consciousness.

A few yards away, beside a fallen horse, a swarthy Moslem, shrouded in white, dropped his gun beside him. His eyes rolled heavenward, and he toppled to earth, after one wild, convulsive effort. "Allah-il



Allah," he choked, and died, just too late to feel the solid bulk of a furious Briton drop upon him, and hard, white hateful fingers clench his black throat, choking and shaking him in avenging fury.

## CHAPTER XVI

THERE followed for the Mayfield an age of sleep and horrible dreams, of fevered thirst and wild delirium, a shadowy existence which was neither life nor death.

It was filled with phantom shapes that came and departed, sometimes like ministering white angels, and again like black fiends, to probe and wrench the body of clay, wracked with pain, that hung like an enormous weight upon her spirit. She struggled to shake that body off, and to rise free and buoyant into a realm of music which was calling her, but the life stream flowing through her veins was too strong.

So she awoke one morning, pale, weak, and wondering at the light, in a clean and comfortable bed, sole furniture of a barren room which she remembered but dimly. Her eyes strayed dully about its bare walls. On one of them they encountered the chamber's only ornament, a crucifix. She closed them, and slept awhile.

Awake again, she began to remember. She had been a very sick woman, she knew. A bandage

gripped her shoulder, almost unbearably tight. She stirred, and a pain left her gasping and dizzy. She must try not to move.

She recalled dropping to earth in an aëroplane with Hubert, and running toward the huddled camel train where Monte must be awaiting her. Then had come the blow, and delirium. She had been shot. She wondered if she were getting well. Then a spasm of fear clutched her heart.

Had Monte been hurt? Was he still alive?

She looked toward the headboard of her bed, with the hazy recollection that a button was hanging there upon a cord. When one pressed that button water arrived almost immediately to cool one's parched tongue, even as rubbing a lamp might bring a genie. It was where she expected, and she pressed it.

The effort tired her and she closed her eyes again. When she opened them, a man was standing beside her bed, a man of middle age, smooth shaven, with a seamed, grave, almost stern face, but kindly eyes. He was clad in a loose robe of creamy white, caught at the waist by a rope girdle, from which, upon one knotted end, there hung that same figure of Divine Sorrow which spoke its message of expiation for human sins from her chamber wall.

He was a priest.

"Where am I?" asked the Mayfield. Then she tried to rise. "Is Monte well? Is he hurt? Is he here?"

A firm hand pressed her shoulder, and she sank back upon the pillows with a stifled sob of pain. She heard the priest answer:

"All is well, my daughter. Only rest. Are you in need of any service?"

"Where am I?"

"At the monastery of Chiraz, where you have lain for nearly a month, and where you will recover from your hurts if you only remain calm, and will help."

"Chiraz?"

"An oasis in the desert, where none but our brotherhood and the roving heathen live within many miles, but a camel train arrived last night which will take you back soon to your friends."

It was all so strange, this white robed monk, his soothing voice, and his talk of oases and camels. The Mayfield wondered whether he were part of her delirium.

"But Monte," she insisted. "Mr. Carroll—or Mr. Starrett? Is there a man named Starrett here?"

"There was a Mr. Mainwaring," replied the monk. "He went out of the desert after your animals. The animals are here, but he did not return with them. He left you a letter."

"Give it to me, please. You have it here?"

"Patience, my daughter." Stilling her protests, the priest withdrew a glass thermometer from his robe, shook it, and despite her rebellion inserted it beneath her tongue.



"A Mr. Mainwaring," he had said. The Mayfield closed her eyes once more and a chill certainty gripped her that Monte had been killed. He would have come with her, otherwise. He would have taken pity upon her, seeing her stricken there upon the burning desert sand which had been his battle-ground; wounded, perhaps killed, for her effort to save him.

His old love for her surely would have triumphed then, if he lived. He never would have abandoned her. Yet it had not been he who had brought her to this monastery. It had been Hubert.

Monte was dead; she was sure of it. She did not care now whether she got Hubert's letter, or anything else. If Monte had died, she had been the one to bring him to his doom, and death would be sweet if it would take her too.

From beneath one tight-shut eyelid a tear stole out, then another and another, coursing down her wan cheeks.

The thermometer was withdrawn. "All is well," said the calming voice above her. "You are weak, but you will get well, thanks to God,—and may it be pardoned me—to His servant, who was for many years a physician."

She sensed that he was departing, but she did not stir. A great grief possessed her, and she lay beaten beneath it, till sleep came once more to heal her.

Waking anew, she remembered. She called for the letter, idly, achingly, wondering what might be in it.

Phrases of kindness and consolation, probably, from a very gallant Englishman.

Then she read. Her heart leaped to life once more. A great joy was joined to a great sorrow, turning even that sorrow sweet. Monte lived! She had lost him, but he lived! God was good!

"Dear Diane," read the note. "Don't worry about Carroll. He's lucky, and he's able as the devil at this desert game, even though I'll always consider him a damn fool, as you know. He brought us to the monastery and then pushed on. He and I spent one evening together, and we had a bit of a row, even though I'm going to marry his sister. He refused point-blank to talk about you, but I talked, considerably. The fracas ensued.

"Don't mind him. As I write this you've spent ten days wrestling with death and winning. I knew you'd win. You're too magnificent to be beaten by anything now. So I've gone out after a camel train, and will bring it back to take you home to Paris. Buck up, old girl. We'll soon be sitting in front of the Café de la Paix with a couple of tall glasses in front of us, watching the crowds on the boulevards.

"Your devoted servant,

"HUBERT."

A deep well of affection for Mainwaring gushed within her, mingling with her happiness. But she forgot him in a minute, for her thoughts went all to Monte, the "able as the devil," pushing on into the

desert upon his man's errand, into what perils she knew not. He would win through them all. It was he, not she, who was too magnificent to be beaten. And he lived!

The guilt of his blood had been lifted from her head. She had sinned against him grievously, she who had loved him, for her love had turned to hate. What madness! Through her dim, musing consciousness the sound of tinkling camel bells was wafted from beyond the walls of the monastery. They seemed to hint a tune, a subtle melody. The melody brought her an instant's image of Galuppi, the painter, and she almost heard his voice:

"There is much of Salome in you."

She stirred uneasily. Galuppi had been right. Then came the vision of Djina Nuova, that other Salome, tortured by the love of the saint who flouted her, and dancing in her naked beauty before the degenerate Herod as the price for murder.

"Dance for me, Salome." She heard the senile ruler plead.

She too had danced, a modern Salome, beseeching the death of that dear man for whom she yearned, no saint but a warrior, riding now unafraid in the desert, a warrior knight of the storied type who kept his honour as untarnished and gleaming bright as his sword, and who therefore scorned her.

"Monte, Monte," she whispered, as if he were close

to her side and could hear her, "I love you, dear. I was insane when I tried to hurt you."

He lived! And to ease her longing for him she summoned up his vision, lying beside her, wrapped tightly in her arms, heart against beating heart, their lips united. But even as she whispered incoherent love words against her pillow, phrases of endearment to an imagined passionate lover, she heard once more that evil music.

"Dance for me, Salome!"

The echoes of her madness rang in her ears. She heard the singing of the violins in far-off Paris, through which the immortal soul of Strauss was telling the age-old, ever-new story of love distorted into passion, the tragedy that had been Salome's in Judæa, and later, hers.

The tragedy of love that sprung from the very heart of God to ennoble and uplift his earthly children, to be a little part of Him residing in them; dragged down, and vilified, and caricatured by their warped desires.

She shuddered, then resolutely locked a vision of flaming sweetness out of her heart. "I am Salome born again," she sobbed. "And Monte is like John. He never will be mine."

Days passed.

Bright desert noons penetrated to her cloistered chamber and set its dust-motes dancing in the sun. Days brought her healing, but little peace. And be-



tween them were the nights, long sleepless nights wherein she grieved, raged at the fate that had wrecked her youth, and lit pale tapers to sad memories, to the little, fleeting moments of happiness she had known when she and Monte were younger, and their paths ran together.

She worried. She was troubled because the camel train which was to take her out of the desert had arrived at the monastery now many days ago, and Hubert was not with it. Hubert had said he would return, and he had not.

That brought to her battered nerves the menace of Sir Humphrey. She could see in Hubert's absence the sinister shadow of the financier, sitting in his Paris study but directing lawless men upon the desert. Woe to those unlucky men,—or women—who chanced to stand athwart the accomplishment of one of Sir Humphrey's schemes. Calmly, dispassionately, inhumanly, in his beautiful home he would read of their puny presence in a report from one of his emissaries. He would speak a few curt words to Critchlow, his secretary. Those words would fly across the skies or under the seas to the furthest corners of the earth. And those who opposed him would be brushed aside,—perhaps wiped out.

She had no doubt that Humphrey knew her every move, and every motion of Hubert's, their share in saving Monte from the attack of his Touaregs. Saving him? How could she tell? Monte had in-

sisted on plunging ahead with his mission despite attacks from natives, despite the warnings which Hubert must have given him, despite the fact that she who loved him had nearly died to save him. She had been in the monastery for weeks. She began to worry about him again. For all she knew, by now Sir Humphrey's men had returned to their attack. Even now Monte might be lying dead in some far waste, his mangled body food for vultures. It was more than possible. It was probable. Magnifying these perils and fearing Sir Humphrey delayed her recovery.

But the day came, one sultry morning in early summer, when the kindly monks were able to carry her out of doors. Two stout friars lifted her upon a stretcher, and bore her out to their courtyard, this strange, fragile and fragrant feminine guest whom chance had brought to share and to trouble their cloistered sanctuary. They left her alone with its beauty.

Here was a cluster of stately palms to shade her, and beneath them was grass unbelievably green, about a desert spring of crystal water. Here the brotherhood had constructed a fountain; it was a pillar of liquid, iridescent diamonds—shot with golden light; a pillar that laughed and danced—and murmured little songs; a live thing, friendly to all who would linger by its side.

This garden which the monastery completely en-

closed was in the midst of desolate sandy wastes which stretched in rolling waves about its baked-clay walls for miles, like a hot white ocean.

The Mayfield cried out in sheer delight at seeing it, at being out-doors again, bathed by the radiant sun, beneath an azure sky. She had spent too long in pain within the four bare box-like walls of her dim chamber.

“Oh, beautiful world!”

She stretched out her arms to embrace it. Here was a place for reverie and dreams. She lay in languid comfort, musing. She was alone in the courtyard except for one robed figure which she could see across the fountain in front of the farther wall. She watched it moving back and forth, the hooded figure of a man in a brown robe, who walked with a different air from the slow tread of the white robed brotherhood. In his hands he held a measuring rod with which he was spacing and marking the barren wall. He paused from time to time to make notes upon a small pad of paper.

A lay workman, thought Diane, as she watched him. She wondered what change in the building he was going to make. Something about his ceaseless activity held her eyes upon him. It seemed so strange that a man should be hurrying here in the monastery where day merged into day like one long dream and time stood still.

The man came striding across the courtyard to the

fountain, and stood there watching it. His face was toward her. There was something familiar about him.

Then she recognized him with amazement.

"Henri," she cried.

A strangely altered Henri Bezanne, unnaturally white. His tangled mane and beard were gone. But his burning eyes were the same. Diane would have known them anywhere.

"Henri," she called. He started—gazed—and walked toward her slowly. She saw him recognize her. He darted forward and caught her outstretched hands in both of his.

"Madame, —madame,——" He could speak no more. His eyes which had been alight with pleasure to see her there became dimmed with tears. He looked away. Then Diane understood.

"My poor Henri," she murmured. "I'm sorry."

He turned back to her and tried to smile bravely. "*Maman* is well and happy, Madame,—but I am alone."

Mrs. Mayfield recalled the woman bent with years of toil who had made the artist's studio a little home, who had waited tenderly and proudly upon the bruised genius as if he were still a child, and who had pleaded with her on the darkened stairs,—“you will not hurt my son.” Deep sympathy for the artist swept her. Small wonder he was so changed. Yet Henri a monk? The pagan painter? She scarcely could believe it.



"So you have come here to live," she breathed, in her amazement.

"To Chiraz! As better men than I have done before me." He seemed to sense what she was thinking. "It is not strange, Madame," he replied, though she had not voiced her thought. "It is not a far journey for one who worships Beauty to turn to the worship of Love. I have lost none of my old gods in finding them servants of a Greater. And I have found some peace and reason in a world which for years seemed anguished and sad."

"That's fine, *cher ami*," the Mayfield answered softly. She repressed an inner bitterness that would have made her cry out, "I wish I could."

But the artist's keen eyes, now cleared from their storm, were exploring hers. Diane remembered how he had studied and understood her in the studio. "It is really very simple, Madame," he said. "You have been sick in mind and body. I could tell you how to be healed,—how I was healed,—if you would let me."

"I wish you would."

And the Mayfield listened, smiling now a little ironically within herself. She knew what method would be told her by a new and zealous convert. But she was fond of Henri. And it soothed all men to talk of themselves to women.

She watched him. His hands were released from hers and he had folded them before him. He was

telling the expected story, as it had come to him, a story common enough for centuries since children's minds have been moulded by women imbued with great faith in the Galilean. But the artist was telling it with a heart obviously on fire, eyes storming at a city beyond the clouds, beholding a woman who was dead and in her grave, yet alive and in close communion with him.

"My mother was a holy woman as surely as any of the saints," he said. "And I held her in my arms when she died. 'Henri,' she said to me, 'your *maman* is only a poor unknowing peasant and you are a great genius. But you are afraid because I am going to die. I am not afraid, because by the grace of our dear Saviour I shall never die, though I leave you for awhile. But after a time, in God's good time, I shall be living quite near you to help you as long as you need me. I know, because I have prayed long and earnestly to the Blessed Virgin, and she has told me, just as she told me you would live when you were a little baby, often sick, and once so sick with fever that your breath flickered almost out, like a candle in the wind.

" 'You were but skin and bones, Henri, and all your little ribs stuck out most pitifully, and you were so nearly taken from me then that you scarcely had strength to cry. I was afraid then. But I prayed hard to the Virgin, because somehow she seemed nearer to me than God. She was a Mother, even as I, and had

brought forth a Son with pain. I recalled that to Her, Henri,—I was so terribly frightened,—even as one mother to another, and I swore to her that if She would go up to the high throne of her Son God, and plead with Him to save you, I would dedicate you to His service. And all that night as I held you close to my breast I prayed. In the morning you cried aloud, and the fever was leaving, and I knew She had heard me. Then in my joy I cried, just as you are crying now,—which is quite foolish because I am going to live after I leave you,—but I cried too, because you too were going to live.

“ ‘I dedicated you to the service of Her Son, Henri, my little baby. But because I am only a poor, unknowing *paysanne*, and you are a great genius, I have somehow failed to bring you to serve Him. Though I have burned many candles, and prayed both night and day as you know, you were too strong for me. Perhaps I shall pay because I have failed, but the Blessed Virgin will know how I tried.

“ ‘I tell you these things because now for some time I cannot be near you.—I must—pass through the shadows,—is it not written? But afterward,—I shall be waiting for you, Henri, and we shall live together again. You will come, will you not, my son?’

“ ‘What could I say, Madame?—Nothing but ‘yes, *maman*,’ and kiss her white hair. I told her, ‘yes, *maman*,’ because she was worried over her promise to the Virgin, and all I could do was to promise her

masses, and candles burned for the repose of her soul. To everything she asked me I answered, 'yes, *maman*.' Why, Madame, I would have enlisted in the service of the Devil himself,—God save me,—had she asked it.—I loved her.—Do you know what it is to love?"

"Yes," whispered the Mayfield. Her mind leaped over the desert toward Monte.

"I know she was happy when she died," said the artist. "For at the very last she smiled to me and said, 'my wonderful baby boy,'—and then she fell asleep. Suddenly I realized that the room was very cold, and that I was the only person there.

"I can't remember clearly the days that followed,—except that I cursed God,—and that her funeral was a maze of stupid lights and silly chants, and that I was reeling, hot and cold by turns. I heard the clods of earth drop, one by one,—heavily,—upon her decent box of painted wood in Père Lachaise. Each spadeful was a blow that made me cry with pain, till I rushed from the place and walked for hours, hard and fast through the city.—I was alone, and my *maman* had been taken from me.

"I walked the Seine that night, and it was beautiful, when all the world was aching ugly. Dark and deep as the grave where *maman* had gone,—and underneath its surface were reflected the lights of the bridges, like slender lanterns of rose and emerald and gold, casting their rays far down to guide one, if he



should leap into its mystery.—And I would have jumped, had not my *maman* called to me,—when I was on the very parapet.

“‘You will come to me, will you not, my son?’” I heard her voice. Then I was afraid, for I was on the brink of a great sin, which would have made her grieve even in heaven, and would have robbed me of all chance of ever seeing her again. ‘You will come to me, will you not, my son?’—I tell you I heard her call me.—Then I knew that the way to join her lay back through the city I had left, but where from there I did not know.

“It was revealed to me. Old Father Benedict, who christened me, came to the city and told me of this monastery. It is very old, and some of the pictures painted in its walls are faded with time. He gave me the chance to renew them, and a place to hide myself in peace, where I could grope my way toward heaven, since that was her wish. And he gave me that whole blank wall over there, where I will paint one picture to the glory of the Virgin, and to the honour of one other of God’s angels who must certainly sit quite near Her in the heavenly choir,—whom I have known on earth.”

“You will do it wonderfully, Henri,” said the Mayfield. “And I will come back to the monastery some day to see it, if I may.”

“Surely, Madame, I hope to make it something fine.”

“And have you found happiness in religion, *cher ami?*”

“I am finding it,—little by little,” the artist replied. “But now,—already,—I have learned a marvellous thing. That there is one Eternal Spirit in the air more great than Beauty! Greater far! For all the loveliness of earth which I have worshipped all my days is only one of Its myriad works.—It is the spirit of Love. I have not lost the riches that were mine in following Beauty as divine. I have gained more of them, rather, for I have traced them to their source. I think I have found their explanation and Creator in the infinite, almighty spirit of Love, which men call God.”

## CHAPTER XVII

THE monastery bell struck softly. It roused the artist from a silent reverie. "I must go," he said. "It is time to pray. I believe you could find peace as well as I."

He clasped her hand.

The Mayfield watched him go and settled back upon her cot. She watched the empyrean sky and the crystal fountain. "Perhaps I could find it here," she mused, "following Henri's path, from beauty up to Love! There is beauty and peace in this courtyard, and the world is far away."

\* \* \* \* \*

But suddenly her ears were almost shattered by the wildest uproar from beyond the monastery gates. There was the sound of rifles firing, of bells ringing, and horns blowing, wild voices raised in weird halloes, approaching from a distance ever nearer and nearer.

It did not seem to disturb the white-robed friars

who were striding past her, hastening to answer their call to prayer. Diane sat erect.

"What is that?" she asked of one who was passing near her. He stopped, and his eyes followed her gesture toward the desert.

"A caravan is coming in," he replied. "Whenever a caravan approaches an encampment or settlement it makes the biggest noise it can,—an old custom,—to show that it does not approach by stealth, as it would if it were attacking."

"There's no stealth there," laughed the Mayfield nervously.

There was something frightening, startling, in that raucous din, swelling ever louder and closer. It was an impious invader. It was battering down the wall of silence and of safety which the desert raised invisibly about her place of refuge against the strife and turmoil of the world. She was apprehensive of it.

The clamour ceased. She breathed a sigh of relief.

She speculated upon the caravan's business. Perhaps Hubert had arrived at last. Perhaps Monte! Ah! if he only had! Her heart leaped. Then another priest impersonally stood before her.

"Madame," he said, "there is a gentleman come from far away to see you. He asked me to bring you this note." He handed her a thick white envelope, unsealed, unmarked. With nervous fingers



she fumbled at the flap and drew forth a single small card. She read:

Sir Humphrey Leinster.

Her heart stopped beating a moment, then raced in panic. A feeling of faintness came over her.

Sir Humphrey here? Here in the desert? She was so weary, so worn with suffering. How could she meet this foe of all her happiness, this man relentless to pursue and possess her? The financier had placed high value upon her to have travelled so far. But this was no conquest for her. It was battle. He seemed a giant ogre, which she as a little girl in some distant dream had teased from his slumber, so that now he had risen to rend and devour her.

“Dance for me, Salome!”

She trembled, feeling suddenly cold. What good were Henri’s counsels now? And where was Henri’s God? She was conscious that her mind and body lay benumbed, almost inert, helpless to foil Sir Humphrey by stratagem or strength. She wanted to lift up her voice and cry out, “No!——No!——I will not see him.” How useless that would be! Humphrey was not the man to be turned aside in his determined course by any woman’s “No.”

She hated him. She despised him for his cold-blooded, callous greed, and for the wickedness of his intrigues. Yet she remembered that he could stir

strange feelings of affection within her, by revealing those other facets of his nature,—his love for music, his loneliness, his open admiration of her, and even his unconscious display of that Titan's power which he so misused. She was afraid.

Then it flashed across her like a sudden, brusque, icy wind, that he was not there in the desert pursuing only her. He must have known by his marvellous system of secret intelligence how Monte had beaten off his Touareg marauders; how Monte continued to defy him, and followed his quest for oil, the stakes of empire, undaunted and unswerved.

Sir Humphrey must know now that Monte was an antagonist worthy of his steel, no pigmy opponent, to be flecked contemptuously aside. The financier had come to the desert not only on an errand of courtship. He had come to fight, she was sure. He had come to wage merciless warfare on the man who not only challenged him in the field of industry, but who stood as a formidable obstacle in his path toward the woman he loved.

She must rouse herself from her lethargy, shake off her wan desire for rest and sleep. She must fight for Monte though he was not hers, for she was his. And then a realization awoke within her that this was the love she was seeking, that guarded by this love she would find peace and joy, even in the midst of battle.

This was the love she was learning under the rod

of suffering; the love that gives without stint, not asking for reward; the love that finds its greatest joy in service. This was the love she was groping for, and finding, now that her lush, warm body was broken and white and subdued; the love that rejoices in being spent, and weak, if only the beloved may exult and be strong; a love that is no raging appetite, no longing to be sated, but a pure flame, sacrificial, burning calmly and eternally within the heart.

"Dance for me, Salome!"

Yes, she must dance,—and she must also fight. Before, she had danced for Herod. Now she must dance for another. The white-robed brother stood waiting.

"I will see him," said the Mayfield, smiling up from her cushions.

There was a moment's calm in the courtyard. The fountain sang a cheerful, tinkling song. Then Sir Humphrey stood at her side.

"My dear, dear friend," he said.

The Mayfield reached up one fragile hand to be clasped in his great brown one. "Are you sure?" she asked, with a trace of mockery. Then she let her hand lie quiescent in his. She and Humphrey gazed long and studiously into each other's eyes.

"You are changed, Diane," said the man. "You have suffered."

"While you are just as always, faithful suitor. Won't you sit down beside me?"

He found a stool nearby and pulled it close to her cot. Seated, he removed the white pith helmet which had shielded him from the desert's scorching sun. The Mayfield experienced once more her involuntary liking for him, for his strong features and shaggy mane, and for the keen glint of his eyes.

"I did not know you ever travelled so far," she murmured, throwing down the gage of battle.

"For you," he replied. "For you alone." He picked up the gauntlet, as she had known he would.

"And that means?"

"I have come to take you home, to Paris, not only because I love you, but because you need me."

"I'm sorry, Humphrey. But my answer is the same as always. I can't go with you."

"Because you love Carroll."

"Yes." She spoke her answer proudly, firmly.

"That's why you need me," he replied gravely.

She started. There was something sinister in the sureness of his statement, and in his tight-shut lips that now curved scornfully downward. His eyes were hard, and when she met them they seemed to be beating against her will, to break it.

"You're pitiless, and strong," she accused him inwardly, pleading without voice for his iron will to soften. "What could you have meant by that?"—"That's why you need me?"—"He talked in riddles. That was why she did not need him. She loved



another, and that love was sufficient to fill her life. He could have no further place in it. But he seemed so certain! A horrible fear engulfed her.

"You've hurt him! You've killed him!" she cried.

She lifted herself from her pillows, sat upright, with a force that did not spring from her weakened frame, but from the spirit within it. Her eyes shot fire in deadly enmity, raging against his, but the financier's were inscrutable, unmoved, as always.

"No," he denied. "No—I assure you I have not hurt him. Any hurt that he has suffered he has brought upon himself. I have not killed him. But I believe he has killed himself,—as far as you are concerned,—though he still lives. It would be better for him perhaps if he were dead.—Lie back and rest.—There!"

His two strong hands gripped her shoulders gently, forced her backward, till she lay prone once more, rebelling but helpless.

She listened, while he spoke relentlessly, dispassionately as if he were unaware of the storms he was arousing within her. His manner seemed to say that he was merely relating to her the facts which had been inscribed upon the book of their destinies, while she had lain unknowing and apart from the world, within this desert monastery. She would want to know them now. He was her one true friend, come to this far-off spot from his busy affairs to

help her, since she must pick up her broken life, must mend it, and make it anew.

"Once," he said, "I ordered Carroll's death. It was your wish. But when I learned how desperately you wanted him to live, I countermanded the order. I knew I could not win you that way. I even went further, since you were not beside me, to tell me what you wished. I ordered him to be protected. I made his life as safe on the lawless desert as in a Paris church. And that despite the fact that he was my opponent in business and in love. I did it for you, Diane.

"Nevertheless we fought. You know how business is fought. And you know I always win. My expedition beat him to the desert oil reserve. And because I wanted Carroll for my own,—just as you wanted him, esteeming him highly,—I beat him in his home office. My agents in the Gulf induced old Redfern to throw him out, upon the basis of that old scandal which Redfern did not know; that Starrett was Carroll, drummed out of a Boston club for cheating at cards. Old Redfern is a stickler for honesty in his men, and that's another reason I will beat him, because I work with all men for what they may mean to me.

"There's nothing in the open warfare I have waged but what you will pardon me. But since you are one of the strong, as I am one of the strong, you will never pardon Carroll."

"I don't have to pardon him," cried the Mayfield.

"No?" he inquired ironically. Then gravely: "He refused to pardon you. And you have pride, Diane. I doubt if you will pardon him."

"What do you mean," the woman pleaded. The hints, the veiled suggestions in Sir Humphrey's words, and the cold certainty of his tones were torture to her.

"I mean that when he was beaten, instead of fighting back, he lay down and cried. He took his beating like a dog. He whined that he was ruined. Then he gave himself up to wild orgies, seeking oblivion with drugs and liquors, and with Sudanese girls for amusement in his tent."

"You lie!"

Sir Humphrey smiled. "Oh, I don't expect you to believe me, at first. But you may see for yourself. And then he heaped one crowning insult upon you. How long have you been in the monastery?"

"Nearly two months."

"For the past five weeks he has been encamped within ten kilometres of here. Has he ever come to see you?"

The Mayfield was silent.

"You know he has not," pursued the financier grimly, brutally. "He has never tried to thank you for offering your life to save him when he was in peril. He shows his gratitude by camping almost at your door with feminine companions of another

colour. He tells you plainly he prefers them."

"Oh!" the Mayfield sobbed. "You lie! How unspeakably vile you are!"

"I will visit his camp to-night. Will you come and see for yourself?"

The palm trees above her seemed to be reeling, giddily; their background of blue sky seemed turned to saffron, then to red; some invisible hand was clutching at her throat and strangling her; she was breathless in her struggle to shake it off. She scarcely knew what she was doing, but she knew she must go to see Monte, to prove or disprove this terrible accusation against him, by which Sir Humphrey was torturing her.

"Yes—I'll come," she moaned. "Now go away, please,—a little while."



## CHAPTER XVIII

THAT night the Mayfield walked and dressed for the first time since she was wounded. She walked with trembling, shaking steps, leaning on Sir Humphrey's arm, from her chamber to the monastery gate and out upon the sands. Despite the protests of her doctor-priest, she was ready and determined to ride.

She would not,—could not believe what the financier had said. And yet Sir Humphrey always knew. Sir Humphrey always won. She walked in a daze, in an agony of spirit beside which all the bodily pain she had suffered seemed as nothing.

The desert before the monastery gleamed reddish white by the light of a dozen resinous torches, held aloft by burnous-clad natives. By the wavering glow Diane could see with how great a host the uncrowned king of European industry had surrounded himself for his African journey; a small army of men and horses and camels, now moving with shouts and seeming confusion in preparation for the march.

She watched them align in serried ranks, swart

Touaregs, mantled in flowing *djellabas*, perched aloft on ambling, long-limbed *mehari*, a company that trailed its rear far out into the darkness beyond the flare of the torches. At their head was a mongrel bodyguard for Sir Humphrey, half white, half tan, in tattered pale-blue tunics which once had served a nobler cause, who pranced into line on hard-bitten, rough riding desert ponies. And moving about them all in swooping circles were the great man's subalterns, ex-officers, gentlemen adventurers, smartly uniformed, mounted on full-blooded steeds that reared and curvetted and fretted to be off. Here was a formidable band of cut-throats, armed to the teeth, ready to move with military precision and fight to the death at a nod from their leader's head, a gesture from his hand.

An Arab brought up the Mayfield's horse, a big-boned English mare. She mounted, cross saddle, and the effort cost her so dearly that she ordered herself strapped to her mount. She had not realized she was so weak, for all her violent illness. Her white teeth sunk deep into her lips.

"I will—I will—I will," she repeated inwardly, to keep herself going.

Sir Humphrey mounted beside her. Her straps were adjusted; the reins were in her hand. She and her escort moved over together into the van of the cavalcade. Close by, the last commands were shouted.

Then suddenly the lights were gone to rearward. Silence ensued. The monastery had vanished. Diane was riding in rhythmic unison with her horse, through darkness, across a vast and empty desert.

It was an inky black, unfathomable night, with never a star for guide, but Sir Humphrey's men rode swiftly and surely. They were led by a Bedouin guide who knew the arid plain by the very feeling of it beneath the beating hoofs of his horse; who took his bearings by the scudding clouds of ghostly grey, weighted with sharp and spiteful particles of sand that whirled about his head, and by messages from intimate, familiar winds upon his upraised, moistened finger.

They rode in silence and in absolute darkness. No flaring torch served to light them and betray their presence. The only noises that came to the Mayfield's ears were sibilant breathings from the unreal, dream-like phantoms riding near her, the creak of straining leather girths, the occasional rattle of military accoutrements, lashed to the straining sides of horse or *mehari*, but ready for instant action.

At first she had to conquer the aches of her battered body. Then she became accustomed to the jarring pace, and to the animal beneath her knees. Her head, which had reeled in dizziness at first, became clear. There was a fresh wind in her face. She liked it, and she loved to ride. She could think.

Sir Humphrey had held before her eyes a crazed

and unbelievable picture of the Monte Carroll she was going to see; a picture sent him by his spies, infesting Monte's camp. It showed that tall, strong hero of her dreams a broken pigmy; it told her that the dark ascetic who had scorned her loveliness was turned promiscuous rake; it held him up to laughter and contempt; a poor, weak creature who had held his head up high when winning, but who whined when beaten and sought oblivion in the most sordid vice.

Diane laughed nervously at the impossibility of it.

Then she turned her head to where Sir Humphrey rode beside her, upright and strong in his saddle, the brain and dominating will of all this shadowy company. Sir Humphrey was sure. The woman felt a moment's panic, then gripped for self-command.

How could it be true? It could not! Yet she was riding toward the proof, said Humphrey. She must be ready to deny the proof was anything but false, deny it even if she saw. And if she saw?

Ah! She caught her breath with a sharp intake. If she did learn that Monte, far from being the stern Puritan of her imaginings, was in reality only as other men; that he was no rare saint, but the usual sinner, and she no scorned, tragic Salome, but just another foolish woman who had let herself be deluded into believing a man could be virtuous!

She flamed with hot rage and mortification. She laughed herself to scorn. Why, of course that was



it. Humphrey was always sure. Humphrey was always right. He knew that Monte had insulted her. It must have amazed him that she still loved. It amazed her, now.

Men were all alike. Her lips writhed toward a determined smile while her long dark lashes fought with tears. She was on the border of hysteria. Another illusion swept away! How Monte had deluded her, with the memories of their youth for his ally! She raged at herself for having been such a simpleton. She, the Mayfield, woman of the world,—she would have staked her life on Monte's being "different."

And in her ears there echoed her own amused, compassionate counsel to a pretty little girl-bride she knew, who in the sanctuary of her boudoir had sobbed into her breast the tragedy of discovering her husband's past amours.

"My dear, you mustn't expect to catch a virgin."

Yet that was what she had expected. That firm belief had been the one sure article of her faith, in the whirling maelstrom of a pleasure-loving world run dissolute.

"What difference does it make?"

She must regain her poise. She was no innocent débutante. How absurd of Humphrey to have come all this way to tell her this banality. She glanced over at his upright stature, that image of strength, of power, of shrewd domineering will. And then she

thought of the Monte she was to see, the broken, weak, and soiled. The contrast turned her cold.

"You are right," she addressed him, mentally. "Perhaps a better woman would forgive. Perhaps a nobler love than mine would stop and lift Monte up. But Monte fallen from his high estate is another man than the one I loved. Monte fallen is Monte dead,—dead to me."

Her mind flashed back to the spectacle of that hideous executioner, descending into a dungeon on the vine-hung Galilean terrace, and bringing up to the tortured Salome the severed head of a dead man who had been a living saint. The saint was dead. She shivered in disgust.

And Monte too was dead, since the one thing living in him which set him apart from all other men had been slain.

The Mayfield on her desert ride looked far within herself, and caught a glimpse of the very heart of Salome.

This was the heart and soul of Salome, the daughter of Herodias:

(And this is the heart of all the myriad modern Salomes who walk with pride in their velvet skins, their scented flesh, and their round, white limbs, tending their charms, anointing them, offering up incense before them, living votive lives for them, like carnal priestesses kneeling before rotting altars:)

To know their own fleeting beauty for the greatest

good, for an omnipotent god of conquest, and by its power to rule over man;

To rule over docile, foolish men, all men but few. To be secretly scornful of men for their weakness, but to use them, cajole them, pretend to serve them, and obtain from them all the decorations, all the pomp and ostentation, all the rich ceremonies which a jealous god demands;

To tremble a little, and to fear, at the thought of men like John, to feel abased, insulted, their very god outraged and angry, when The Baptist's eyes turn from them to some other vision.

To recognize in rare, strong men like this a challenge, and to love them.

Love them? Perverse Salomes! To love only them,—since all the others, easily brought to heel, must always suffer something of contempt. To be consumed with hot desire for them, sensing by feminine instinct all that centuries of men have learned, into what utterly satiate peace the troubled longings of voluptuous flesh may be whipped, beneath the scourgings of a first, strong passion.

Salome's spirit, working within the worldly Mrs. Mayfield told her that shrewd Sir Humphrey had seen aright. Monte corrupted was dead to her, for love, merely another dupe to play upon.

Their caravan had halted. A circle of wraith-like figures grouped about Sir Humphrey. They dashed off, one by one, on their varying errands. The little

knot of horsemen about the Mayfield remained motionless, but she could hear deep-throated, guttural commands, and then the padding splay feet of the camel-men's mounts swung into motion once more and departing, far out to the right,—far out to the left.

They must be near Monte's camp. What manœuvre was this? It came to her that the Titan's band was encircling the camp which Carroll held. Another voice than Salome's spoke within her, protective woman's, that of a woman struggling yet for faith. They must not hurt him.

"Humphrey," she called.

The financier side-stepped his mount closer to her side, and leaned to hear her.

"What are we doing?" she asked. "You're not—you're not going to attack him?—You're not going to do him more harm."

"Of course not, Diane. I tell you I would not harm a hair of his head. Would I ruin myself in your eyes? But my men surround his camp, as a precaution."

"But why?"

"Because I must be prepared for any eventuality." His voice held the reasoning gentleness of an adult, soothing a captious child. "You and I will walk unarmed and alone into his camp,—as his guests."

"Does he know you are coming?"

Sir Humphrey laughed grimly. "Hardly. He



doesn't know much of anything. But the men in his camp know."

Out of the night came the Bedouin guide, with another purple figure riding beside him. The newcomer advanced till his horse's nose was at the Mayfield's hip, between her and Sir Humphrey.

"Evening, folks," came his jaunty voice. "Why, if it isn't Mrs. Mayfield. *Bon soir, Madame.*"

The Mayfield recoiled. It was "Plug" Malone, Sir Humphrey's most execrable henchman, risen out of the desert, no doubt from Monte's camp. There was villainy here, and Monte was its victim.

"How goes your friend?" asked the financier.

"Stewed as a turtle," chuckled Malone. "With a cute little Sudanese chicken named Vannah to sing him lullabies."

"How long has this been going on?" inquired Sir Humphrey. The woman caught the note of cold contempt in his voice. Her heart sank.

"He went crazy when Redfern's man brought the word he was fired," answered the spy. "Started to drink all the medical supplies. Then when he found you'd beaten him to oil that finished him. Want to come look-see?"

Sir Humphrey's horse stepped forward, and his henchman wheeled to be at his side. They stopped and talked in low tones, while the Mayfield watched them, her soul in frantic rebellion.

Malone had been set as a spy in Monte's camp.

Had that been all? Sir Humphrey swore he had ordered Carroll protected. Malone was no protector, but a tool for secret villainies. If Monte really had been brought down, if really he were what they said, there had been incredible, desperate wickedness in those about him. Through the Mayfield's brain there raced wild stories she had heard of drugs, applied by Orientals, secretly in food and drink, such herbs and potions as set men mad, drove them insane and bestial, odd tales for laughter, told in Paris salons, of wilful countesses and failing lovers, that had moved her to nausea.

And suddenly, like a blow in the face, conviction struck her. Sir Humphrey lied when he told her Monte had wrecked himself. He had sent Malone to wreck him and the wretched deed was done.

Humphrey had known he could not win her while Monte remained her ideal. He could not win by killing his foe. One thing only had been left to him, to wreck that ideal and change it to loathing. With that unscrupulous, devilish determination which had lifted him through so many intrigues and wars, over so many dead men's agonies, to untold riches, he had wrought his rival's ruin,—through Malone.

She did not doubt he had succeeded. Sir Humphrey always succeeded. He was taking her now to see his triumph and to crown it. The financier had turned his horse, and was at her side.

"I am sorry, Diane," he said quietly, solicitously,

"but if you'd never learned what a rotter he is, at heart, you always would have loved him."

His words capped her conviction. It was true.

"It's not true," she stammered, fighting him weakly, denying still.

"Will you come into the camp?" asked her tormentor, coldly imperturbable.

"Yes—I'll come."

She stifled a cry of heart-break. If Sir Humphrey had ruined Monte, she shared the guilt. It was she who had betrayed him, by her tortured avowals of love and hate. She had even besought his ruin.

"All set?" asked Malone, riding up.

*"En avant!"*

The trio moved forward together, at a sharp trot, leaving the company behind them. Face to face with viewing so sad a havoc, the wreck of that strong man whom she had loved, and ruined, Diane was terrified.

"It can't be true—it must not be," she breathed between clenched teeth. She would have hung back, if she could, dreading the proof. But Sir Humphrey's certainty benumbed her. She rode forward helplessly.

Then piercing the blackness she saw the flickering of a fire, his bivouac. Soon she would know, and she steeled herself. A huddle of tents took shape in their path, and they pulled their mounts to a walk. A sentry rose almost from beneath their feet, but

Malone tossed him a word and they passed. They were within the camp before the spy laid a restraining hand upon Mrs. Mayfield's elbow and they came to a stop.

No lights save in one tent. But from that tent there came a sound at which the Mayfield's tears began to drop. She did not try to stem them.

So Sir Humphrey had won!

A barbarous, rhythmic measure was being beaten within the tent on a taut-stringed tom-tom drum. Above it soared like the plaintive wail of a soul in the agony of naked want and mad desire, a weird and minor melody blown through a flute to accompany a woman's voice. This woman was singing gently, softly, a series of Arab verses, so fraught with one universal passion that their import could not be mistaken.

Diane fumbled frantically at the straps which held her to her horse. She loosed a restraining buckle and leaped to the ground, reeling as much from wretchedness as weakness. Her companions were at her side.

"Stay here," she commanded them fiercely.

She ran forward unsteadily to the entrance of the tent, while the beating iteration of the drum was hammering staggering blows at her heart, and the wails of the flute and woman's voice were rasping, torturing every hot nerve within her throbbing temples.



"Monte—Monte," she sobbed.

She stood in the door of the tent.

The wavering, greenish flame from a single brazier was all that lit the scene. But it served. It cast strange shadows on the draped tent-walls that shifted, billowing in the fresh night breeze, and across the forms of four persons whom Diane would be many years forgetting.

Directly in front of her, across a stretch of multi-coloured rugs that carpeted the desert sand was the man she loved. He was lying upon a rug-decked cot, close to the floor, beside a tiny tabouret that held all the paraphernalia for a prolonged drinking bout. His head, supported on one hand, was nodding. He seemed almost asleep. His face, which had been bronzed by years of rugged out-door life now seemed in the sickening brazier-flare an unhealthy, evil white.

At his feet squatted the two native musicians whom the Mayfield had heard from without. They were swathed in their mantles, bowed to their rhythmic task, beating and wailing the melody of the damned. And before the outstretched figure of the nodding Carroll, knelt and swayed in sinuous, rolling measure the brown-skinned Vannah, the desert beauty for men's delight, while she sang her song of seduction. Her long arms slowly waved and writhed, like languid, sleepy snakes, charmed by the music, and charming in their turn the man they must soon enfold and poison.

The Mayfield walked slowly forward, without volition, impelled by an inner force. She no longer was sure what she did. She stood close back of the dancing girl, and looked at Monte over those undulant arms.

A shadow seemed to cross his face. He knitted his brows, and looked up. He saw her. His eyes seemed glazed, but filled with a queer light which puzzled her.

"H'lo, Diane," he muttered. "Where's your friend, Humphrey?"

Then the arm that supported his head collapsed, and his head dropped on the rug-draped cot.

The Mayfield's heart dropped with it. "I believe I am dying," she told herself, feeling the room begin to whirl. "I hope I do." A hand at her elbow steadied her, and she heard Sir Humphrey's voice in her ear.

"May I take you home, Diane?"

Fury gripped her. Her head cleared. She whirled to face him. "Not now, nor ever," she panted, recoiling from him. "Not now nor ever! I despise—I abhor—I loathe you!"

Then she fell, covered her eyes with her hand and wept.

"Cover him, 'Plug,'" she heard a familiar voice cry out, and looked up, dazed and wondering.

The man she loved who had been lying on the cot, seemingly prone in a stupor, was hurtling through

the air, as she had seen him do years before in a crowded stadium, with thousands cheering to watch him bringing down a football foe. And Malone was looking on, grinning!

The financier was toppled beneath his onrush, but Carroll rose to his feet, clutching his shaken antagonist by the collar at his throat, shaking him in deadly wrath. Sir Humphrey's face turned livid.

"Monte!" screamed Diane.

Carroll stepped back. "Frisk him, Malone," he commanded sharply.

A small, black object was in the shaken financier's hand. He was raising it toward his lips when Malone reached forward and snatched it from his grasp. He tossed it almost in the Mayfield's lap. It was a whistle to summon rescuers.

"Traitor," snarled the overthrown Titan. He struggled to his feet. Malone was covering him now, with a pistol. The king of industry turned white, but his clenched fists showed it was anger and not fear.

His voice when he spoke was calm and level, and deadly with venom. "It is my practice to make traitors regret the day they were born," he said evenly.

Before the power in his gaze Malone's gaze shifted a second, but he did not lower his weapon. "He's my old army skipper," he muttered.

The Mayfield laughed to herself. Now she remem-

bered that Monte's sister had told her that, when she was dancing with Malone so long ago at Claridge's.

"You should have known your man better, Sir Humphrey," cut in the cool voice of Carroll. "He was rigger for my plane at Château Thierry. He wouldn't betray me. Nor anyone else, now. There's one good he-man spot in everyone. Malone's my buddy."

"You are crowing," observed Sir Humphrey sardonically. "But it's a trifle early."

"Because your men have me trapped?" asked Carroll. "I know. But I've got you. Sit down. —Sit down, I say."

Diane watched and listened. In her heart there flamed anew the joy of faith. She should have known! Ah! She should have known! And she had doubted him. He was in such hideous peril. But every accent of his loved voice was telling her he would win through. She exulted, hysterically, between inner laughter and tears. This man of hers was strong! Of hers? She trembled with the echo of an old grief in her ears. But all her desires were dormant. Salome slept, perhaps had died. Died in that moment of pity when she had seen him and believed him beaten and helpless. She was a woman transfigured by love.

"And in my pocket," the even voice of Monte was saying, "when I return to civilization are the proofs of your intrigue with the foes of France. It will take



more than all your influence to keep you from a firing squad if I use them properly."

"They are your death warrant," smiled Sir Humphrey, taking a cigarette from his case and lighting it.

"I think not," Monte demurred, "though I'll let you go to your men in a few minutes."

"Ah! Don't," warned Diane, crying out sharply.

"You tried to do worse than kill me with your drugs," Monte pursued, without a variation in his tone. "Perhaps I ought to kill you for that. But we don't get rid of our enemies that way,—any more,—across the ocean."

On the distant night wind was blown to their ears the silver call of a bugle. The sharp bark of a rifle shot answered it, nearer them.

"What's that?" asked the Mayfield, apprehensively.

"Kick him out, Malone," laughed Monte to his man. "He'll never hurt us now." He turned to the Mayfield. "That's Hubert," he answered, grinning broadly. "Good old Hubert, riding to join us with two companies of blessed French colonials. We've trapped the trapper."

They were alone together. Monte looked down to where Diane sat upon the oriental carpeting of his tent. The woman, looking up into his eyes, saw something in them that made her tremble, that sud-

denly blinded her, with a vision of what terrible splendours this world can hold.

He lifted her up, and a great joy bubbled up within her like the crystal fountain in Chiraz, and like it laughed and sang and danced in the sunlight of her heart; tremulous, more wonderful than jewels, more bright than gold.

There was a rattle of musketry out in the night, and he started. She clasped him tightly, frantic at the dangers into which she knew he would go.

"I must go out to lead my men, Diane," she heard him say. "Before I go will you tell me you forgive me?"

She lifted her head, and his arms drew her closer, —closer.

"I love you," she whispered, while their eyes met and clung,—and then their lips.

THE END











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